

Lars Albinus

**Religion as a Philosophical Matter**

**Concerns about Truth, Name, and Habitation**



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Concerns about Truth, Name, and Habitation

Managing Editor: Katarzyna Tempczyk

Series Editor: Thomas D. Carroll

Language Editor: Thomas D. Carroll

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For Anne, Jens, and Lars



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## Introduction

During the interwar period of the former century, thoughts were developed which seem to have had a lasting impact on Western philosophy. The aim of this book is to integrate some of these thoughts in a renewed understanding of religion. The particular endeavor is led by two interrelated theses: First, I claim that crucial, but generally overlooked, relations between religion, philosophy, and science come to light when we take a closer look at our human inclination *to construe the world as a home and make it true by way of naming it*. Secondly, I claim that philosophy unfolds within frames of thinking which are, on the one hand, constituted by historical limitations and, on the other, by unalterable conditions of human existence. Taken together these claims imply both that historically different forms of truth, naming, and habitation, nevertheless *share* a profound similarity when it comes down to being world-relations and also that only the tension between a diachronic and a synchronic view can bring about this perspective.

The kind of world-relation that most fundamentally sets human beings apart from other animals is language. In terms of consciousness, the realization of mortality is also essentially human. Religion in all forms is perhaps the most obvious expression of this. A religious consciousness, however, can be many things. At the root, I think it eludes a philosophical conceptualization. In order to access religion as a human phenomenon which is neither too close nor too far away, I argue that we will have to comprehend it from a premise we already share with it, namely, the premise of being a world-relation. Accordingly, my endeavor to gain a philosophical perspective on religion will focus on the kind of language which is charged with responses by intellectual beings to the condition of mortality. However, it is crucial to keep the historical differences of these responses in mind. What I hope to lay out in the present work is, in other words, variable, yet interrelated concerns with being-in-the-world as symbolically reflected in the human form of life. Within this frame of orientation, the present work is, first of all, a philosophical attempt at rethinking religion.

That being said, the book does not present a program and has not dropped its anchor in an immediate objectification of religion as one phenomenon among others. Fundamentally, I would say that such an investigation doesn't need philosophy in the first place, but are actually better off with *theories* of various kinds. Instead of regarding religion as something that can be investigated, either from inside as theological self-reflection, or from the outside as a disowned form of life, I intend to investigate it in the borderland between 'inside' and 'outside', or being and non-being, which is a place where philosophy generally feels at home, I guess. Thus, it is my ambition throughout this study to proceed in ways in which religion, philosophy and science can each change their appearance between objectified phenomena and assumed points of view depending on the argument.

It is my contention that philosophy cannot think religion without thinking about itself as thinking, and therefore arguments concerning the critical limits of a philo-

sophical investigation will take up quite some space in the present work. In brief, I regard philosophy as a conceptual investigation the instrument of which is already conceptual. It is, therefore, bound by a certain circularity which it should not expect to transcend but rather reflect upon. This is what makes it philosophy in the first place. I recognize, of course, a self-transcending tendency of language, not only in the paradoxical sense that what it refers to by its own means is something different from itself, but also in the fantasizing sense of pointing towards ‘essences’ or some ‘ineffable reality’ beyond the sensible world. The kind of philosophical reflection subscribed to in this book makes a point of speaking from *within* a linguistic immanence, even though this immanence cannot conceive of its own givenness. Far from denying that it is, therefore, *in a sense* returned to a sense of transcendence, the point is to acknowledge – and stay away from – the conceptual void, or transcendence, of this condition. However, the very consciousness of the boundary of conceptuality invites us to at least imagine the *possibility* of excess, and thus calls for an interaction with myth and religion, where ‘beginnings’ and ‘essences’ take up the names of divine beings, inhabiting an invisible world. However, if human reflection is, by definition, turned against its own limitation (reflecting ‘on the limit’, to borrow an expression from Foucault), the conceptuality of this reflection may actually be the very point of interest (not to say intersection) between religion and philosophy. The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy articulates a similar thought by stating that “what touches me out of an elsewhere that I can consider indifferently as ‘in’ me or ‘outside’ me, as within this world or outside it, because I am touching the limit” (2013, 75).<sup>1</sup> Yet, on philosophy’s part it means: being conscious of not overstepping constraints of conceptuality, to reflect on “the linguistic being of things” (*Das sprachliche Wesen der Dinge*), as Walter Benjamin has expressed it (GA II.1, 143),<sup>2</sup> and this should not be seen as a self-imposed directive as much as a precaution to secure a defensible conception of meaning.

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1 “This step beyond”, as Nancy writes, “is the doing of *sense* – or *language* – which is, in all of its forms, a referring to the outside”, op.cit. 78. Language wouldn’t be language if it did not have an outside, an externality to which it refers. Yet, the outside wouldn’t be an outside if it wasn’t for the inside of language through which it becomes what it is *as an outside*. Yet, the very “step beyond” (*pas au-delà*), as Nancy calls it, is exactly the movement by which language (as such) and religion *touch* each other, as it were.

2 It is important to notice, however, the reservation with which Benjamin takes pain to avoid the reification likely to follow from this linguistic turn. “The view that the mental essence (*Geistige Wesen*) of a thing consists precisely in its language – this view, taken as a hypothesis, is the great abyss into which all linguistic theory threatens to fall, and to survive suspended precisely over this abyss is its task” (SW, I, 63, cf. GA, II.1, 141). I find it misconstrued to translate ‘*Geistige*’ with ‘mental’ in this context, pervaded as it is with Biblical language, but the main point, Benjamin makes, as I see it, is that to stay suspended over the abyss of sheer ‘*Sprachlichkeit*’ is, at the same time, to acknowledge its gravitational power, without giving in to exchanging one essence with another.

The emergence of these constraints of conceptuality, their creative origin – or perhaps we should say: the outer side of their world-encompassing network – can neither be conceived by religion nor by philosophy or science. How should the latter, for instance, be able to grasp the opening up of human cognition other than through the means of language preconceived in it? That it may indeed be possible to point out pre-linguistic forms of cognition does not change the fact that this empirically certified knowledge is only thinkable *through* the medium of language.<sup>3</sup> And it would be a profound mistake to take such knowledge to imply that we have actually transgressed the boundaries of what language allows us to think. The same constriction, philosophically speaking, applies to religion, or what is thought, claimed or done from a religious point of view. The coming-to-be of language remains in the dark, and confronting this darkness thoughts may unfold that brings modern philosophy back into the neighborhood of religion. Whereas science, crudely speaking, tends to trivialize the constrictions of language (insofar as science chastises itself by holding an instrumental conception of language), philosophy is in general (from a pragmatic to an analytic approach) inclined to view the very givenness of language as significant and charging. Looking beyond – or farther back than – the shared conceptuality of theology and philosophy, one may say that myth, in a way, incorporates the very emergence of language, yet without demonstrating any conception of this. Inasmuch as religion is understood in the sense of a developing, yet inchoate, estrangement from myth (an understanding which, at least, flourish in academic literature), we may associate ‘the religious’ with a dawning awareness *of language* as an insufficient means of reaching out for the holy (including, from a modern point of view, its own origin). In this sense, religion is born from a rupture that stems from recognizing a rift in being (as, for instance, in the proclamation of the disparity between the creator and his creation). The ultimate reality withdraws from language resulting in a perception of religious acts, gestures, and utterances, as being merely symbolic. Religion and philosophy therefore come across each other at the brink of an abyss, the darkness of transcendence, engaged with the attempt to conceive of that which cannot be fathomed. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it: “Myth and the abyss are the postulations or figurations inscribed by philosophy, from the very beginning, as its own limits” (1997, 50). Yet, in religion this transcendence is kept and guarded as being otherworldly or invisibly present, whereas in philosophy, at least within the confines of secularized disenchantment, transcendence is acknowledged according to the immanent limits of language alone and, therefore, approached, not as transcendence, but as a *concept* of transcendence.

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<sup>3</sup> This view may be criticized for submitting itself to an exhausted transcendentalism, but it is, in fact, rather a way of critically recognizing self-generating implications of a totalizing view, whenever such is adopted, for instance, in science.

Let me phrase this line of thought by citing, once more, Jean-Luc Nancy, who asks the unanswerable question: “Where does [language] come from?” In lieu of an answer, as it were, he writes:

From the nonplace that opens in the midst of world and beginning with which things open, shift, and happen, things constantly replay this coming, this approach, and this shifting, this trembling in which everything comes about: the world, life, sense, the thing, all of them fortuitous, uncertain, vibrating, unsteady. (2013, 67)

The aim of the present book is to approach religion while embracing this unsteadiness at the heart of the conditions of signification. Religion may, consequently, slip in and out of the picture, inasmuch as it represents a similar opening up of things. This is, at least, how Nancy views Christianity, namely as a proclaimed utopia (non-place) opening in the midst of the world.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a sense, to approach religion is to approach the limits of language. The philosophical routes opened up by this recognition, especially during the interwar period of the former century, shall determine the direction of the present attempt to find new orientations within a philosophy of religion. It is hardly disputable to claim that contemporary philosophy still unfolds in the aftermath of innovations from this period – following, or reflecting, the fall of traditional metaphysics. What I want to focus on in this respect is how it changed the way of thinking about religion. I will not let the intervening appearance of post-secular conditions defer me from assimilating insights which may be still be intrinsically, not to say historically, valid. Innovations in philosophy take time to mature, and even if they may never reach beyond a certain historical horizon, I am not sure that the horizon within which Heidegger, Benjamin, and Wittgenstein were thinking, has come to an end just because we live in a time when the social phenomenon of religion, stretching from faith to fanaticism, seems to be waxing rather than waning on a world-wide scale. The cost of alienation, the struggle for power and identity, in a globalized society is not, by itself, an argument for regarding religion in a completely new light, though it goes without saying that as political proclamations, religious traditions are deeply involved in these trends. However, as a discipline, philosophy is obliged to know better than to let mere appearance decide the agenda for reflection. I am not so sure, for that matter, that we have finished absorbing the revolutions of late modernity and the kind of thinking that evolved along with it, despite the perplexing speed of perceptible changes in today’s world. It is thus my contention that

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<sup>4</sup> One might also refer to Foucault’s journalistic question concerning the Islamic revolution of 1978 as being “a movement through which blows the breath of a religion that speaks less of the hereafter than of the transfiguration of this world?” (cf. Afray & Anderson 2005, 223). Foucault’s obvious miscalculations aside, we should not be fooled by the ‘religious’ rhetoric, and although Islam surely has not undergone the same process of Enlightenment as European Christianity (especially Protestantism), the socio-psychological aspect of re-opening the world may also apply to Islam.

important aspects of religion, not least in regard of its current state, may still be seen in light of thoughts that developed at the beginning of the former century.

\*

‘Philosophy of religion’ is traditionally concerned with criteria of rational validity – or propositional justification – of religious belief, and the discipline is therefore often associated with a theological discourse (in an ‘analytic’ as well as in a ‘continental’ context). Yet, in our world of multifarious candidates to truth, other tasks are queuing up for a philosophical reflection on religion. For one thing, the general study of religion, which does not commit itself to any confession but that of interpretative science, is just as much in need of philosophy as theology is. Although we do not normally associate philosophy of religion (PhR) with comparative studies of religion, there is no argument for not doing so in the future.<sup>5</sup> If the expected implications of theological philosophy stand in the way, one might respond that, strictly speaking, a philosophy of religion which deserves that name is a philosophy of *religion*, not a philosophy of truth-conditions *internal* to religion.<sup>6</sup>

But of course, much depends on our definition of religion, and even the smallest hint at this matter will quickly draw us into a most heated debate. I shall not avoid the issue, but merely postpone it as a question to be dealt with in due course and at a proper length. Let it suffice to say, as an introductory remark, that I ineluctably find myself surrounded, as it were, by a worldview in which ‘religion’ appears as a comparative phenomenon. As a compartment within this cultural ‘building’ or ‘enclosure’, which is my worldview, as it were, there is also theology, even as an academic discipline (although in some in situational contexts more committed to the critical standards of science than in others). It goes without saying that theologians share the same cultural worldview as the rest of society; their beliefs and interests are as varied as everybody else’s. As a discipline, however, theology takes a certain non-comparative interest in assessing the truth and value of its own tradition. In other

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<sup>5</sup> For a similar view, Bryan Rennie, 2011, 1–9; Timothy David Knepper, 2013, 75 ff; Kevin Schilbrack, 2014, 3–25.

<sup>6</sup> Though I concur with Knepper that PhR should leave its shelter within Christian ethnocentrism and start to philosophize “about that which religious studies studies”, I find his view of philosophy too old-fashioned, and restrictive, inasmuch as he urges PhR to “take account of religious reason-giving in as many places and times as possible”, 2013, 22. Why should *reason-giving*, the all-pervading focus of Knepper’s book, be given so much attention? In fact, he even states himself that “the philosopher of religion needs to be mindful that reason-giving is merely one facet of the religious activities of humans, and at that, one that that is not that prevalent or important in some religious traditions”, op.cit. 102. It goes without saying that philosophy needs to present reasoned arguments as much as any other academic discipline, but why should it only deal with religion as far as reason-giving goes? Furthermore, I find the exhortation to look in as many directions as possible to naïvely suggest that one escapes ethnocentrism by simply committing oneself to a quantitative measure of comparison.

words, one might say that theology is *tradition conceived in thought*. For the general study of religion no such agenda seems pertinent.

A die-hard metaphysical implication in the study of religion is to regard religious phenomena of whatever kind (from the most familiar to the most exotic) as formed by cultural conditions to which the scientific outlook itself belongs in a more critically enlightened stage. In light of this general humanist stance one might wonder why philosophy of religion is not primarily occupied with religion as a second order phenomenon rather than with a first order set of beliefs in a transcendent reality, as is predominantly the case. It goes without saying that it has to do with the discipline's theological tradition, but inasmuch as philosophy is not committed to tradition over and against its commitment to critical thinking, including a contestation of that which is unthinkingly repeated, I shall, in the present work, advocate for a philosophy of religion that places religion on the phenomenological side of things, not because there is no need for a theological philosophy (or a hermeneutics of religious utterances), but because in today's world such an agenda cannot, or should not, stand alone. In this respect, I refer to 'religion' as a comparative concept comprising a set of largely identifiable phenomena (second order), and 'theories of religion' (third order) as explicatory engagements with these phenomena. I surrender to this 'objectification' for practical reasons only, claiming no philosophical insight to go along with it, let alone follow from it. I rather regard the phenomenological specification as a conceptual maneuver the necessity of which is purely formal, yet at a deeper level already part of the complex about to be reconsidered. Hence, if 'religion', in this book, is pushed away from the confines of theological reflection, it is also lured away from the general study of religion, inasmuch as it returns as a kind of bedfellow, strange and familiar at the same time, to the philosophical investigation. For the same reason, it should be obvious that I do not want to repudiate the merits of a more traditional PhR (and the orders of classification developed on these premises); my aim is merely to lend thought to a general tendency in recent years, namely the attempt, from various quarters, to integrate philosophy in the general study of religion.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, I opt for a communication between philosophy and the study of religion, where 'religion' is, at any rate, a label for something that has lost its holistic meaning in a Western society. My point here is that the historical development of 'religion' as a term has brought with it a conceptual divergence, a distinction between religious and non-religious phenomena, which does not necessarily apply to former historical stages. It does seem mandatory, however, to work from a concept that conveys *something* universally identifiable, at least in a preliminary sense. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to speak meaningfully about religion in a global as well as historical perspective. In other words, we cannot avoid the need for a universal taxonomy. We may

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<sup>7</sup> One may mention, at random, Thomas D. Carroll, Steven Engler, Gavin Flood, Nancy Frankenberry, Mark Q. Gardiner, Terry F. Godlove, Jeppe S. Jensen, Tim D. Knepper, Bryan Rennie, Kevin Schilbrack.

bear in mind, however, that this is only valid for operational reasons, and we should not overlook the possibility, therefore, that, below the surface, as it were, this ‘something’ which appears neat and definable in one context may change its meaning – or turn into something else – in another. I am not referring to implicit essences behind varying appearances, but I claim that a certain configuration of attitudes, acts and thoughts, may be recognizable in different contexts beyond the exact terms of their expression. What we may be inclined to call ‘religion’ in one social setting may rather be identified as ‘politics’, ‘science’, or ‘philosophy’ in another. What the thing called ‘religion’ was earlier, and what it is now, in a society – or reality – that it no longer comprises, may be two different things,<sup>8</sup> and then again, may also have something in common which, all else being equal, still deserves the common (non-essential) predicate (of ‘religion’).

Obviously, in ancient societies, even in Roman times, from whence we have adopted the term, the thing called ‘religion’ had not yet become ‘religion’ in the comprehensive sense of the modern predicate (which is, however, no problem as long as we take care to distinguish between phenomenon and concept). What we may have recognized since the dawn of modernity as various semantic and pragmatic characteristics of religion – the thing – are properties we have come to define owing to the advent of alternative ways of thinking. I would not want to deny, though, that it is always possible for the human spirit to depart individually from the dominant ways of thinking and acting in a given period, and consequently the possibility of making distinctions (as between commitment and non-commitment, faith and non-faith) have, in principle, always been optional. Yet, in the broad historical perspective, the concept of ‘religion’ is a recent invention which betrays an enlightened strategy of demarcation. Let it be said at once, however, that I find it wrong-headed to take this condition to imply that the term denotes nothing but artificial boundaries around an empty core. There may be no ‘thing’ *independent* of our categorizations, but there may be no ‘nothing’ either. We have to stand guard against a radical nominalism that invites us down the unfortunate path of *ontological* constructionism (not to be confused with epistemic constructionism). Actually, it seems to be a frequent mistake to think that if concepts are coined and developed in the impure matrix of strategic formation, they must stand in an arbitrary relation to what they are supposed to designate. This is a logical mistake inasmuch as the conclusion implies the opposite as its premise. We can only claim that words and things don’t match if we have an epistemic access to the relation between them, and if this ‘access’ is given up as a matter of principle, it is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In point of fact, the objective is a different one.

In order to take the strategic formation of concepts seriously into account, we need criteria for assessing in what ways they may *relatively* misconstrue the objects

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<sup>8</sup> See especially Berger 1990.



they represent. Even if there is no one-to-one criterion for an adequate representation, inasmuch as any representation will always be aspectual, there may still be representations which can be criticized for representing their own *representing* activity rather than the *represented* phenomena. I sincerely believe we should harvest the best of insights from Bachelard, Foucault, Kuhn, and constructionist theories in general, without buying into the relativism that lurks in their wake. Religion is a human construct (whatever kind of reality it may *concern*), doubly constructed by being dubbed ‘religion’, and triply constructed by whatever definition our theories may entitle us to use for it. The name of the game is construction; our social reality is a *constructed reality*. Money and tax and debt are what we make them out to be, but they are *real* nonetheless.<sup>9</sup> In the case of these ‘entities’, however, the constituents are intrinsically well defined, and I venture to say that it makes them significantly different from religion (the thing). If, at any rate, it is possible to speak of similar constituents of religion, they belong to a reverse order; their reality is *post factum*. Where the specific means of economic transactions in society are instigated by strict rules, religion does not depend on such measurements and regulations (as neither does art, partying, bodily exercise, etc.).

Rigid rules of confession may, of course, be regarded as compulsory, as in the development of new movements and departures from a parent tradition, but if we should speak of a religious community only when all the rules were followed all the time, then we would speak of none. In fact, a religious community thrives as much from its sinners as from its saints. To be a member of a religious community is not necessarily ‘to play it right’ but rather to have the parameters set already for ‘playing’ as well as for ‘violating the game’. Importantly, not all of these parameters might be explicit. Some social facts are constituted by explicit rules, others are not. And we might not want to narrow our view down by counting religion only among the former. Adopting John Searle’s concepts (1969) of *constitutive* and *regulative* rules, I am inclined to say that whereas social and linguistic phenomena such as bills, promises, claims, etc., are made up by the former, a phenomenon such as religion is rather characteristic of the latter (as is eating, mating, dancing, etc.). I grant that the operational use of a strict taxonomy, designed to verbalize these rules, *may* work regardless of their open-ended character, as long as we keep in mind that they inform our *concept* of ‘religion’. Yet, a stipulative definition also carries the risk of confusing ‘a model of’ with ‘a model for’, as Geertz has shown (1993, 93). However crucial it is not to mistake regulative rules for constitutive ones, a sliding from the one to the other may often go

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<sup>9</sup> John Searle has worked out this line of thought, cf. below 4.2. One may also refer to a more Durkheimian version of a similar perspective in Clifford Geertz, who thus regards ‘systems of symbols’ and ‘cultural patterns’ as ontologically analogous to material realities, writing that “Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture”, 1993, 91.

unnoticed. It is worth pointing out, at any rate, that it is only in the unlikely event of coming up with criteria for defining religion which are *both* necessary *and* sufficient, that we are, in fact, entitled to explain the actual phenomenon as a conglomerate of constitutive rules. Such conceptual venture is unproblematic when we refer to chess and other institutionalized games and sports, and though, of course, spiritual movements *could*, in principle, be formed in much the same way, the life of long-standing traditions seems to follow a deeper track and attain a much vaguer character. Thus, a compartmentalization of religion as an isolable, exhaustively defined set of beliefs and practices *flies in the face of what we observe*. I shall return to this matter, which indeed cries out for further differentiations, and stay content for now with a preliminary appeal to concerning ourselves with religion as a human construct with layers upon layers of dynamic social interaction.

If religion can be regarded as an open-ended social ‘game’ the roots of which run deeper than what can be ascribed to acknowledged commitments of belief and behavior, it also means that there is no necessary coincidence between what religion means in the self-interpretation of the adherents and what it means – and entails – in the horizon of a historical, philosophical and scientific approach. I regard William Cantwell Smith’s assertion that “No statement about Islamic faith is true that Muslims cannot accept” (1981, 97) as profoundly mistaken. As crucial as it is that we do not sever the bond between the extrinsic and the intrinsic level of meaning,<sup>10</sup> we *should not* conflate the two. It is a matter of balance – and dialectics – between a hermeneutical and analytic approach, and much of what I have to say in this book pertains to this issue.

Yet, a short comment of the concept of *sui generis* as pertaining to the study of religion might be in place already at this point. It was used, for instance, by William James in his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*. The passage runs:

[A]ny object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us also as if it must be *sui generis* and unique. Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a crustacean, and thus dispose of it. “I am no such thing,” it would say; I am MYSELF, MYSELF alone. (1960, 32)

The crab’s protest is understandable, since from the perspective of the individual it is not *just* a crustacean, though from a general point of view *it is*. In accordance with a constructed table of characteristics, this is what a crab can be said to be. But tables are tables, and crabs are crabs, each and every one of which is unique in existence and not merely an example of crustacean properties. Religions are both unique and

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<sup>10</sup> I fully endorse the view of Mark Q. Gardiner and Steven Engler (2012) that we should avoid any strong kind of ‘insiderism’. However, their specific view is informed by the semantic holism of Davidson and Brandom (cf. Gardiner & Engler, 2010; 2012), to which I only partly agree (see below chapter 4).

categorically common (i.e., as an instance of ‘religion’) in the same sense, though different from crabs by being a cultural phenomenon with all the interactive complexity that goes with it. If the concept of religion *sui generis* (literally: of its own kind) is taken to imply that religion (the thing) transcends any kind of classification and has to be lived to be understood, no science or philosophy will be able to take hold of it. If it rather means that regardless of whatever aspect of religion we reduce to other, more fundamental elements, we are still left with a center or a composite, we can justifiably call ‘religion’, I see no reason why *sui generis* should not be used as a concept for this, and I do not take James’ point, which I fully endorse, to speak against it. What it does speak against, however, is the opinion that what belongs to the core of someone’s self-image is nothing but what that someone accepts it to be. That we may allow for constituents in our interpretation of ourselves, which are not immediately accessible to self-consciousness, forms a premise for the following inquiry.

Thus, in the following chapter, I shall aim to work out operational concepts for dealing with points of contact between philosophy, religion, and the general study of religion, aiming for a philosophical platform which remains self-consciously in charge, but hopefully without being too reductive.

Proceeding from this premise, I set out in chapter 3 to sketch a picture of religion-as-a-social-phenomenon, which steals itself to a position behind the back of a religious self-understanding while acknowledging, at the same time, that such position is already itself socially embedded. However, rather than asserting an unconditional truth about religion, I shall use the socio-philosophical approach to point to certain *aspects* of religious discourse in the attempt to clarify how and why such type of discourse works effectively in various contexts. Though I do, in this respect, draw heavily on Searle’s concepts of ‘institutional facts’ and ‘social ontology’, I make every effort, at the same time, to drive out the ghost of a self-conserved consciousness, summoned in his philosophy of mind and still indirectly haunting his view of social construction.

Turning to questions of ‘truth’ and ‘reference’ in chapter 4, I argue against what I find to be unwarranted ascriptions of truth-conditions to the language and practice of religion. My main point is that we should take care not to put too much weight on a concept of truth that is formed within a secular horizon of empirical meaning-criteria. This leads me from an over-burdened focus on referentiality in Wolterstorff’s and Soslke’s philosophy of religion to the more sophisticated theory of truth in Davidson’s semantic holism. Yet, I try to balance important points in his semantic view of meaning with the pragmatic notion of truth as espoused, for instance, by Habermas, Rorty, Brandom and Wittgenstein, albeit with crucially different implications. In light of my own settling with the pragmatic stance of the later Wittgenstein, I proceed to consider how the concept of truth has been used in various philosophical ventures, including those of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger.

From the basic notion of ‘truth’ as a concept whose meaning is delineated by its use, including a translatable religious concept of ‘truth’, I set out in chapter 5 to widen the perspective by unfolding Benjamin’s concept of ‘pure language’, the magical qual-

ities of which relate human beings to the world through *names*, most conspicuously the name of God. This exposition is packed with a discussion about the difference between the linguistic perspective in Benjamin, on the one hand, and the transcendental concepts of spontaneity of symbolic expression in Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of myth, on the other. Striving to avoid unfortunate speculations about some mental reality, I conclude that religion is, fundamentally, a matter of name-giving, and that concept of truth attains its primary *religious* meaning from being associated with the expressive (or creative) power of the name rather than with general statements about reality. In the wider scope of things, I try to show how this suggestion is in line with a conception of a human form of life that dawns, variably but comparably, in the developing philosophies of Benjamin and Wittgenstein as a reaction to a spiritual occultism of subjective consciousness.

In chapter 6 I engage in a short discussion about differences and similarities between 'myth' and 'religion' as a stepping stone for locating both in the attempt by humans, at all times, to make a *home* in the world, or to make *the world* a home, an endeavor that characteristically takes places in light of the beyond. Drawing on the previous chapters, I claim that the role of 'naming' and 'truth' are of pivotal importance in this respect. Additionally, I venture into early as well as late phases of Heidegger's thinking in order to relate the ways in which it opens 'Being' (from 'factic life-experience' through '*Dasein*' to '*Sein*') to the ways in which religion 'opens the world in the midst of the world itself' (borrowing the wordings from Jean-Luc Nancy). However, following Heidegger's style of thinking, I find it increasingly difficult to distinguish the kind of *opening*, he comes to conceive through language (*Sprache*), from the kind of *opening* that is created by religion. Far from claiming that Heidegger succumbs to a religious form of thinking, I retreat from the abyss of 'being thought' so as to regain a foothold, along with Wittgenstein and Benjamin, in the social and historical conditions of 'thinking and speaking about'. Yet, I acknowledge that my own subsequent attempt at characterizing a religious home-making is substantially inspired by the later Heidegger, and that the present investigation is already building a new abode for itself, as it were, not least by considering the religious home-making replaced by the disorientation of modern life. Clearly, the kind of thinking that engages me is a way of being within 'the *outside*' and outside of 'the *within*' at one and the same time. We all think and write from the height of our own being. Yet, philosophy would not be able to breathe if it did not believe itself able to make a conceptual difference. The power of philosophy, as Gilles Deleuze once said, "is measured by the concepts it creates, or whose meaning it alters" (2005, 321). In this sense, a philosophical investigation may be said to participate in something (philosophy itself included) which is, at the same time, kept at a distance. Therefore, a philosophy of religion necessarily keeps religion at bay, however familiar a religious way of thinking and acting may seem in the process.

Thus in the final chapter 7, I go along with Jean-Luc Nancy in order to think religion from the 'inside', as it were, which means, to think both with and against it.

Apart from the general force of Nancy's main argument, namely, that Christianity has from the very beginning entered a process of self-deconstruction, I find it intriguing that his thinking also seems to capture the crucial elements of religion as a truth-making, name-giving, and world-habituating human practice. While he is painstakingly aware of the living present, the current situation of being part of secularized Christianity, it is in large parts philosophical perspectives from the interwar period that seems to reemerge in his thinking. Speaking with Heidegger, the predicament of *Dasein* is that Nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*) lies at the heart Being, and Nancy's contention that religion 'fills in the Nothing' follows up on this thought by way of *thinking* religion. In a way, this short statement by Nancy says it all. However, in order to let it be heard as anything but a kind of Sartrean reference to emptiness or redundancy, a certain journey through religious ways of life has to be made.

Having outlined the field of investigation this journey is now at hand. However, setting out to cross various religious and philosophical territories requires that we first take a closer look on how 'philosophy' and 'the study of religion' have interacted as yet.

# 1 State of the Art

## 1.1 A General Outline

Traditionally philosophy of religion (PhR) is engaged with a conceptual and pragmatic clarification of religious language including questions of validity pertaining to religious (or dogmatic) propositions.<sup>11</sup> In an Anglo-Saxon context the borderlines between theological philosophy and philosophy of religion are often blurred (showing traces of Thomism and Calvinism in various degrees), whereas in a continental context the general critique of religion, associated with Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Marx and Freud, seems to have had a greater impact.<sup>12</sup> In a Danish context, in which I find myself, philosophy of religion is first and foremost associated with Kierkegaard's existential concept of faith and his critique of the Christian church. More recently, K.E. Løgstrup's phenomenological approach to Christianity has also attracted a widespread attention, nationally as well as internationally. There is a lot to draw from on these grounds, but a certain perspective is profoundly lacking. In addition to a philosophy which reflects on faith and the basic conditions of human existence, we need *a philosophy that reflects on the formation of religion as a social and cultural phenomenon*.

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<sup>11</sup> Despite deep-seated differences between a continental and a British-American context, basic definitions of philosophy of religion are often apparently reconcilable as in these instances: "Religionsphilosophie ist die philosophische Erhellung des Phänomens Religion" (Mann, 1970, 11) and the definition of philosophy of religion as "philosophical thinking about religious matters" (Davies, 1998, 1). Still, where Mann devotes a whole chapter to the philosophy of religion *as critique of religion*, such a conception is absent in Davies.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jung, Moxter, Schmidt, 2000, 9 f. It is not uncommon in a British-American context to conceive of philosophy of religion as dealing "with theological and religious questions" in general, though approached, of course, "with the aims and questions of philosophers" (Murray & Rea, xii). A prominent representative of this tradition, William Wainwright, gives examples such as "How do we judge religious systems as a whole? Are there criteria for assessing religious worldviews? Can one religious system be said to be better than another?" (1999, v). On a more general level, British philosophers of religion such as William Alston, Peter Byrne, Brian Heblethwaite, John Hick, Richard Swinburne and Roger Trigg, as well as the members of the American *Reformed Epistemology* such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, have all invested a major interest in the relation between faith and rationality (see, for instance, Plantinga & Wolterstorff, 1983, and Trigg, 1998). Philosophical considerations of a more classificatory nature have also been shown towards differences and similarities between religion and science (as, for instance, in Gregersen & Van Huysteen, 1998; Ian G. Barbour, 2000 and A. McGrath, 2010). It is characteristic of all these positions that the efforts taken in the philosophical reflection on religion are intimately apologetic. While this is not an unrespectable position *per se*, the present efforts to broaden the scope of a philosophical engagement with religion in an English speaking context do, in part, spring from a reaction against what seems to be a self-protecting disciplinary focus, cf. for instance, Rennie, 2011, Gardiner & Engler, 2010; 2012; Engler, 2011a.

There is no shortage of theories of religion. Yet, apart from their enlightening qualities, theories do not make up philosophy. Inasmuch as a theory is designed to solve a given problem as, for instance, by offering a causal explanation, philosophy is, more specifically, a kind of reflection which has a clarifying purpose without necessarily aiming for certain scientific results. Further, a theory is concerned with providing testable results rather than with the question of its own ultimate justification. The latter calls for a meta-theoretical reflection and is thus located in the area of philosophy. But philosophy is even more than that. Although it is indeed concerned with justification<sup>13</sup> and reflexive responsibility,<sup>14</sup> history shows its receptivity to concerns that are not easily reconcilable with these attitudes. Take, for instance, Spinoza's vision of substance, Nietzsche's diagnostics of life and a will to power, Kierkegaard's religious sensibility, and Heidegger's question of Being. If these conceptions belong to philosophy, it should be fair to say that philosophy, in a more comprehensive sense, is the awakening of thought wherever there is something in the human existence that calls for it. Ultimately philosophy does not serve any limited goal and when it is asked to do a certain job, as in the philosophy of religion, it cannot be expected to do it without, at the same time, directing questions to the very foundation of this task. A philosophical investigation may obviously happen to serve theory, but it might just as well happen to alienate its very objective.

What philosophy is, on its own accord, is not easy to explicate, however, since philosophy can be many things depending on the kind of questions raised. However, borrowing a phrase from the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, I should like to adopt the view of philosophy as a way of thinking "undistractedly about things that ordinary human beings cannot help thinking about" (1984, 9). Following this definition, philosophy of religion is primarily the acrobatic enterprise of *thinking about religion while thinking about this thinking* inasmuch as the questions raised concern what we, in ordinary life, cannot help thinking about *as religion*. Yet, thinking *about* religion would not be *thinking* if it was totally detached from thinking *with* religion. And thinking *with* religion would not be thinking in the first place, if religion in any way told it *what* to think. Thus, philosophy of religion is the unrestricted activity of thinking *about*, *with*, and (expectedly) also *against* religion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Habermas, 1999, 48 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Cavell, 1988, 14.

<sup>15</sup> I will have to admit that by 'thinking' I don't mean a dialectical attempt in the Hegelian sense to reconstruct religious ideas in various cultures and contexts as being more or less redeemed expressions of a historically progression of reason. I actually appreciate the lasting philosophical importance of Hegel's philosophy of religion with respect to the teleological synthesis of *an Sich* and *für Sich* as the only way for reason (or Spirit) to realize the concrete determination of freedom, but I buy into a form of philosophy that allows other (and more aesthetically sensitive) forms of thought to engage religious symbols as part of an over-all human world-relation.



Apart from Nietzsche's almost theological in-fight with Christianity,<sup>16</sup> which has quite a few similarities with Kierkegaard, the critique of religion (as projection, illusion or substitution) had its root in the time of Enlightenment and was driven by a self-reassuring concept of reason. In the 20th Century, however, this concept has been severely challenged as, for instance, in phenomenology, pragmatism and Critical Theory.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, empirically oriented philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn have aimed to show how practical concerns, imbedded in a historical and socio-cultural context, influence the production of scientific knowledge. A general scepticism through the 60s thus fuelled (and was fuelled by) a thriving sociology of knowledge,<sup>18</sup> which added to impeding the very notions of truth and objectivity. The irony of it all was, of course, that a seemingly untroubled belief in objectivity was thereby pledged against itself; an attempt was made to unmask the illusion of value-free objectivity by referring to facts which were themselves thought to be objectively available. But even among philosophers who stood guard against the risk of relativism (remaining committed to context-transcending criteria for the validity of propositional truth claims), there was a general agreement that 'reason' – understood as a game of arguments – will always be historically situated; 'truth is a thing of this world', as Foucault once said (1977a, 131).<sup>19</sup> Science was about to lose its newly gained status of self-evidence. Although it has since regained momentum in various branches within the humanities (the efforts invested in cognitive science being a prime example), philosophy still finds itself in a field of problematized rationality, which cannot but influence its concern with religion. A contemporary critique of religion may, at least, have to tone down its own proclamation of scientific reason,<sup>20</sup> and a philosophical engagement with religious truth-claims may realize that it is no longer in possession of an unscathed metaphysics with which to watch over their rational validity. It means that, in some respects, the tables might even be turned, so that a proper philosophy of religion is to partake in a critique of reason. In the current field of interaction between philosophy and theology, prominent voices, ranging from Gianni Vattimo's 'trinitarian' philosophy of religion (1998, 89–91) to the theological

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**16** Cf. Karl Jaspers, 1938.

**17** Among the strong influences behind the abandonment of transcendental reason one may highlight Martin Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, the Critical Theory of 'the Frankfurt School', Derrida's deconstructive strategies, and pragmatism along the lines of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Richard Rorty.

**18** Apart from Kuhn I am thinking especially of scholars like Ludwig Feyerabend, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Barry Barnes, David Bloor and Niklas Luhmann.

**19** One may think of philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas, K.O. Apel, John Rawls, Michael Dummett, Donald Davidson, and Robert Brandom.

**20** Habermas' theory of communicative reason stands out as an example of such critique, not only directed against the blind authority of (a religious) tradition, but also against the uncritical use of instrumental reason, 1981, I (1984).



philosophy of Radical Orthodoxy (cf. Milbank et al., 1999), advocate for this privilege with a passion that is only matched by the naturalistic attacks on religion from the likes of Richard Dawkins (2006), Daniel Dennett (2006), and Christopher Hitchens (2007).<sup>21</sup> Even in a German tradition, where the critique of religion has had a profound impact on philosophy, Matthias Lutz-Bachmann finds it mandatory for philosophy of religion to take part in a critique of reason (2000, 11). However, it goes without saying that an unspecified concept of reason could lead to severe misunderstandings in this respect. Let it suffice to say that the purely idealistic as well as instrumental conceptions of reason which were promoted by Enlightenment thinkers have not survived unchallenged to this day. At any rate, it would be highly unfruitful to think in a crude opposition between faith and reason, or too self-assuredly in an opposition between religion and science.<sup>22</sup> Although various differences are obvious, and some of them probably also constitutive, it is of vital importance for an unprejudiced philosophy of religion that we do not maintain non-reflexive stereotypes. The challenge is rather to keep the field between science, reason, and religion, open for undistracted thinking (cf. Albinus, 2010, 48–51). Even if this intention is idealistic, and perhaps utopian (in the sense of Nancy, quoted above), I shall nevertheless let it stand as a regulative idea for approaching new territories within the philosophy of religion. Otherwise, we would just contribute to the unexamined reproduction of mere confidences.

However, a precondition for getting under our own skin, as it were, is to realize that neither theology nor science can serve as unquestioned authorities, and that neither of them possesses a language to fully represent, or substitute, the other. There are no independent criteria according to which the gulf between the orientation of religion, on the one hand, and the orientation of science, on the other, can be bridged.<sup>23</sup> Both are realities, as both are languages (and practices), and basically they may be regarded as alternative ways of coming to terms with (and coping with) what Gavin Flood (2012, *passim*.) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2013, 33), from completely different quarters, concur in calling ‘the strangeness of the world’. In both optics, the conception of a basic strangeness seem to imply that regardless of how we speak about – or cope with – the world, it ultimately remains an inaccessible, yet inhabited, *whole*. In other words, the world is strange and familiar at the same time.<sup>24</sup> This paradox also shows

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<sup>21</sup> As a reason for paying only a slight attention to this predominantly neo-positivist critique of religion I can only refer to the poor and uninformed notion of religion as predominantly dangerous and irrational missionary systems of belief that permeates these counter-missionary studies.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Derrida, 1998, 28

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 1970, 54–59.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 1963, 8.7.16; Cavell, 1979, 463 ff; 473 ff. As Cavell writes: “I might describe my philosophical task as one of outlining the necessity, and the lack of necessity, in the sense of the human as inherently strange, say unstable, its quotidian as forever fantastic”, 1988, 154. Through the chapters of this book, I have this strangeness in mind and believe to take a pragmatic attitude towards it which is pretty much in line with Cavell’s.

itself, as I see it, in the 20th Century's 'passion for the real' which, in Badiou's optics, eventually settles for the reality of appearance (2007, 48 ff). The political as well as scientific attempt to capture the real must confront its own unreality, forced to choose between the reality of a worldly façade and the semblance of its own representation.

Although it would be a mistake to take this diagnosis as automatically implying a hermeneutic or pragmatic disqualification of a scientific approach to religion, one should bear in mind that no theoretical objectification would justify a methodological dismissal of the pragmatic implications of understanding religion. What we need is rather a phenomenological awareness serving to counterbalance the all too neat objectifications of religion offered by a taxonomically-oriented science.<sup>25</sup>

Another matter is the understanding of philosophy of religion as "a product of the crisis in metaphysical thinking" (*als Produkt der Krise metaphysischen Denkens*), as Thomas Schmidt phrases it (1994, 78). A crucial difference between theological philosophy and philosophy of religion is that the latter is committed to philosophical reasoning only, whereas the former, for obvious reasons, is committed to a certain dogmatic tradition. As a counter-argument to the neatness of this distinction, adherents of Radical Orthodoxy (in a British context) and Reformed Epistemology (in an American context) have pointed out that philosophical and religious reasoning are historically as well as intrinsically intertwined. This claim may carry some truth but is in a certain sense empty if it has no actual bearing on the concrete philosophical investigation (apart, perhaps, from some aspect of its self-realization). If, on the other hand, *it does influence* philosophical reflection to the extent of preventing the latter from taking a certain path of thinking, it would be problematic, or – to put it differently – it would enact the kind of authority by which theological philosophy is – or would have to be – distinguished from a philosophy of religion. So we end up with the same result whatsoever, namely that regardless of what philosophy would implicitly share with religion "it will express in a discourse", as Habermas puts it, "which is exactly independent of the revealed truth" (2001a, 191, my translation). In the same context, Habermas even goes as far as to claim that "a philosophy, which oversteps the boundaries of a methodological atheism, loses its philosophical sincerity" (*op. cit.* 187, my translation). It is questionable, though, whether he would still stand by this suggestion as he has also, for some time now, referred to Western democracies as forming a post-secular society obligating communicative reason to realize "the shared origin of philosophy and religion" (*den gemeinsamen Ursprung von Philosophie und Religion*, 2007, 28). It is quite certain, however, that by this admittance he does not embark on a path similar to that of Radical Orthodoxy, quite on the contrary. He is continuously holding fast to the irreversible inclination of communicative reason to engage in an argumentative dialogue, undisturbed by any other authority than the force of the better argument. Although he respects the right of theology to

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<sup>25</sup> As for a similar point, see Flood, 2012.

speak from internal criteria of a religious tradition, 'religious truths' will have to be translated in order to meet the *general* rules of reasoned argumentation as soon as they appeal to a *general* acknowledgement. It may be held against this principle that the premise of engaging in a formally uncoerced dialogue is, historically, as situated as any debate within the theological confines of dogmatic reasoning. There is undeniably a difference in dialogical openness, though, and it merits some consideration whether or not a dialogue, carried out on the premises of a communicative rationality, is actually able to enact a 'transcendence from within' (*Transzendenz von Innen*), as Habermas claims, whereas a theological discourse remains committed to a kind of authority, which from a dialogical point of view is a blind and transcendent power 'from outside'. However, regardless of the feasibility of keeping a concept of absolute validity even within the confines of communicative reason, the important point is to assign a position for a philosophy of religion that allows it to engage in a reflection upon such matters without having any specific concept of religious *or* rational truth to defend from the outset. Viewed in this light we shall appreciate, and try to work out, some of the intrinsic as well as historical implications of Habermas' reference to the shared origin of philosophy *and* religion.

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In many countries, The Study of Religion has involuntarily become involved in political agendas. This is most prominently the situation in the United States where there has been an on-going debate, if not a struggle, between traditional Religious Studies (RS) and The Comparative Study of Religion (CSR). The difference concerns the way in which the engagement with the phenomenon of religion is conceived. In brief, RS scholars approach the subject as a phenomenon *sui generis* in the sense that they insist on a non-reductive understanding of religious beliefs and rituals. CSR scholars, on the other hand, accuse this approach for being untimely respectful, if not even apologetic, towards a subject matter which is furthermore based on a Christian notion of religion and spirituality. Instead of engaging with what they often, somewhat unqualifiedly, term a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, CSR uses various analytical, theoretical, historical and (cognitive) psychological methods in order to maintain a neutral and scientifically valid conception of religion. Although the struggle is continuing, not least in terms of funding, the North American Association of The Study of Religion (NAASR) has gained a lot of ground, opposing the impact of the older American Academy of Religion (AAR) that grew out of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). The old heroes of the RS school, Mircea Eliade, Joachim Wach and Joseph Campbell, just to name a few, have been replaced by CSR adherents such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Robert Segal, Bruce Lincoln, Luther Martin, Don Wiebe, Timothy Fitzgerald, Gary Lease, and Nancy Frankenberry, as well as the late Hans Penner. Among the younger generation Russel T. McCutcheon and Willi Braun have taken on the challenge.

We find an illuminating example of the chasm between the ‘Eliadean era’, as McCutcheon has called it, and the new dawn of CSR, in McCutcheon’s own *The Discipline of Religion*. In this book, he directs a representative critique against the existential, and in his view politically infested, project of understanding religion on the basis of something universally human. We should stick to the old perspective, he says rhetorically, “only if we presume human beings to have some sort of trans-historical, meaningful, moral center – variously called Soul, a Morality, Experience, Human Nature, or the Human Spirit”, but if, instead, we regard religious concepts as

all too understandable rhetorical tools social groups deploy in order to authorize and reproduce essentially contestable values and worlds, then we will have a rather different understanding of the politics of scholarship on myth or religion, let alone the politics of myth and religion themselves. We may then continue reading scholars like Jung, Eliade, and Campbell, not as exemplars but instead as relics (McCutcheon, 2003, 208).

In other words, Eliade represents “an era that passed” (op.cit. 210), and we should all look for new, and critically updated, perspectives on religion. A prominent example of this objective is found in the *Guide to The Study of Religion*, edited by Willi Braun and McCutcheon himself (2000), an anthology which serves to redirect the general approaches to religion by drawing on contemporary theories in the humanities. Although McCutcheon has a strong point in suggesting a more critical and socio-logically informed approach to religion, he overstates his case in wanting to bury the presumption of anything universal in human nature. In point of fact, he merely exchanges one form of universality with another by making ‘politicization’ the ultimate key to understanding the phenomenon – as well as the traditional discipline – of religion (thus playing on both aspects in the title of his book).

The situation is far less dramatic in Great Britain where Richard King, more inclined towards the CSR, has worked together with another and equally prominent scholar, Jeremy R. Carrette, more inclined towards the RS. Both are employed, however, at faculties of *Religious Studies*, in Glasgow and Kent, respectively. On the continent, the situation is much the same. Although the critical and analytical approach to religion may be hampered by Catholic or Orthodox agendas in some settings, in most places The Study of Religion enjoys curricular autonomy. In Denmark, my home-country, scholars enjoy unrestricted freedom to engage in critical studies of religion. Sometimes the tone of the American debate rubs off on the local profiling of the Study of Religion (*Religionsvidenskab*) and the History of Religions (*Religionshistorie*) as being fundamentally different from Theology. In order to avoid fruitless agendas, however, the philosophy of religion is needed as a contestant against faulty polarization.

The hostility of CSR towards phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches may be justified when directed specifically towards an apologetic agenda in the study of religion, but can be dismissed as unrepresentative for phenomenology and hermeneutics in general. The critique of ‘religion’ regarded as a category *sui generis* has,

in some instances, led to a call for abandoning the concept of religion all together. Some CSR scholars have regarded the concept of religion as too infected by specifically Christian connotations and therefore as pervasively ethnocentric. Hence, they typically claim that we are better off studying culture, values, social organizations and symbolic systems in terms of cultural uniqueness, rather than maintaining the phantom of 'religion', which Jonathan Z. Smith once deemed nothing but 'an academic imagination'.<sup>26</sup> Although the frustration with a politically biased and substantially unqualified conception of religion is understandable, this radical step towards an unrestricted nominalism is philosophically contestable. Nothing is gained by turning the concept of religion into a tacit or implicit category in the study of culture, and it most certainly does not solve anything on a conceptual level to speak of *religions* rather than religion.<sup>27</sup> What is most urgently needed in the study of religion is an informed and reflexive revision of inadequate concepts. The basic disease is not cured by removing the symptoms.

Another matter which testifies to the need for a philosophical clarification is the proclaimed neutral stance of CSR towards religion and/or culture in general. There are, undoubtedly, sound principles of maintaining the standards of critical science, but there is also quite a bit of conceptual confusion involved, perhaps even a possible, yet camouflaged, agenda of cultural chauvinism. This hunch must await a closer inspection. Taken at face value, the claim of a neutral stance is a left-over from the positivist devotion to a theoretically undefiled collection of data stemming from value-free observation. As Habermas (1971, 9 ff), among others, has shown, this cathartic objectivism is ill-equipped to grasp the nature of social phenomena, let alone appreciate and justify its own stance. Rather than indulging the illusion of a neutral position, the study of religion has everything to gain from a philosophical clarification of the kind of relationship *with* religion that operates in a given approach *towards* it (see 3.3.).<sup>28</sup> This latter issue is especially important concerning the study of religion in the contemporary context of multicultural and post-secular societies.

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**26** The skepticism towards 'Religion' as a universal concept is shared by many scholars, cf. Fitzgerald, 2000; McCutcheon, 2003; Stroumsa, 2010; Nongbri, 2013, and condoned also by Richard King (1999), who is working in the field of Religious Studies (although the departmental division between *Religious Studies* and *Comparative Studies of Religion* is primarily relevant in an American context).

**27** For a nuanced discussion of this issue, see Flood, 2012, 12. Although I appreciate Bryan Rennie's point about conceiving of a philosophy of religions (plural) "simply to distinguish it from contemporary philosophy of religion (singular), which I argue to have simply failed to distinguish itself from philosophical theology" (2011, 2), I find the plural form gratuitous on a conceptual level.

**28** In this respect, Heidegger's early courses on the phenomenology of religion, from 1920–21, deserves renewed reading, cf. Heidegger, 1995; see, for instance, James K.A. Smith, 1999, 17–33.

## 1.2 A Debate in Capri

An attempt among prominent European philosophers to come to grips with a notion of religion in our current, globalized culture took place on Capri in 1994. The long introductory comments by Jacques Derrida set the tone for a complicated and highly self-reflective debate where nothing was taken for granted at the outset, or so it seemed.

Showing all possible effort to open the discussion without violating the-already-open, as it were, Derrida asks whether a discourse on religion can “be dissociated from a discourse on salvation... on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed ... evil ... sin” (1998, 2). The very question demands a response, Derrida notes, and in so far as he couples the etymological origin of ‘religio’ to this exact demand, he finds himself committed to rules of an already existing game, introduced and kept alive by what is still *religio* in religion. Thus, when it comes to faith, he sees in it an attitude, which is already present in whatever kind of question that presupposes a response, whether it has to do with the promise of salvation or the promise of scientific truth. Faith is basic, and so religion (or what really matters in religion) must also be. Yet, inasmuch as faith alone does not make up philosophy, Derrida places himself in line with Kant’s work *Religion within the limits of reason alone* (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*), where faith has come to seek human reason as its primary source (op.cit. 10). Lending voice to a messianic tradition as well, Derrida regards philosophy of religion as a reflection that serves to align us with the light (as in *Enlightenment*) of the already present re-presentation of religion invested in the expectation of a promised future. Sophisticated as this hyper-sensitive reluctance to violate the religious concern for ‘the unscathed’ may be, Derrida prevents himself from taking the necessary step *out of the game*, inasmuch as speaks from the non-priestly point of view of enlightened reflection (op.cit. 7). In other words, he seems to be caught in a double-bind, afraid of polluting the purity of faith, but inevitably exemplifying that (religious) faith has already lost its original glory, its originating light, as it were.<sup>29</sup> Derrida does hit a promising note, though, by comprehending religion as a social phenomenon, which is indissociable from the means of what he terms ‘tele-technoscientific reason’.<sup>30</sup> Religion allies itself, he claims, with science and the technical design of modernity in order to protect the ‘unscathed’, albeit with the prize of an auto-immune reaction against its own self-protection (op.cit. 43–46).<sup>31</sup> I should think that Derrida might have been able to make this point without the introductory reservations with which he takes pains to avoid speaking *against* religion. A philoso-

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<sup>29</sup> Already Nietzsche expressed this with relentless clarity, W II, 618 (§ 58), and, as of late, Jean-Luc Nancy, 2008, 2.

<sup>30</sup> In this, he sides with Vattimo, who speaks about the return of religion in the world of late-modern technoscience, 1998, 84.

<sup>31</sup> A renewed version of this thought is found in Sloterdijk, 2009.

phy of religion, as I should like to conceive of it, is not hampered by worries of this kind, at any rate. This does not imply, however, that it should be any less reflexive.

Gianni Vattimo, whose point of departure in ‘weak thinking’ and a ‘Trinitarian theology’ falls neatly in line with Derrida’s faith-conceiving (as well as faithful and messianic) notion of religion, focuses more specifically, along the lines of Heidegger’s concept of Being, on the event-like character of the ‘return of religion’ in late modernity (1998, 91–92). Vattimo takes pains not to engage in any conceptual violation inherent in speaking about *religion* in universal terms. He suggests, instead, to take notice of the originating force of the Trinitarian God who was not associated with *return* (parousia) in any metaphysical sense, but, more than anything else, with reading ‘the sign of the times’ (p. 90). Thus, Lévinas’ philosophy of The Other, which carries a philosophy of religion over into a radical ethics of transcendent alterity, is, according to Vattimo, in danger of losing sight of *the event* of the religious. In such a view, which Vattimo finds to be guilty of essentializing the irruption of The Other, the event becomes secondary.<sup>32</sup>

While endorsing Vattimo’s focus on the event of religion, both as a phenomenon and as a concept, I shall challenge the position of being already *confined* by the frames of religious thinking. A precondition for conceptualizing the event-like character of religion – or the return of religion – is that one is not already consumed by it. That being said, we wouldn’t want to lose sight of ‘factic life’ as the early Heidegger called it, or ‘form of life’ in terms of Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, in our attempt to reach a philosophical understanding of religion. A broadened philosophy of religion has to deal with this dilemma, setting the sails for a journey between Scylla and Charybdis, as it were.

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<sup>32</sup> This incongruence between the perspectives of Vattimo and Lévinas, in this respect, may seem to be replayed in the different approaches (albeit both Heideggerean) taken by Jean-Luc Marion (2002) and Jean-Luc Nancy in their philosophical conceptualization of a religious response (cf. below chapter 7).



## 2 Demarcations and Deliberations

### 2.1 Getting Started

In order to get new issues for a philosophy of religion into perspective, we need some initial reflection on the concepts of ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’, if only to reach a working definition for the specific agenda of this book. The delicacy of this task owes to the supposition that the required clarifications are interrelated (wherefore it cannot be judged beforehand whether or not they are also *interdependent*). This would not necessarily be the case if the aim of the present investigation were to launch a pure *theory* of religion. Inasmuch as a theory contemplates something exterior to its own frame of explication, it claims the privilege of distance. In my view, this is a privilege that philosophy cannot ultimately claim for itself. However, by sticking to this notion of philosophy I already make a claim that presupposes the opposite of distance, that is, an opaque and sometimes unnerving intimacy as the point of departure for philosophical thinking. As a whole, I would say that this starting point is impervious to mere thought, but that doesn’t prevent thought from turning back upon itself in partial recognition of its own preconditions. That is what I conceive of as philosophical reflection. Contrary to theory, philosophy has to take steps that it may later acknowledge as out-of-place, not technically, but fundamentally, inasmuch as its ‘program’ is not a program, but a procedure. “A philosophy”, as Tugendhat says, “constitutes itself only in philosophizing” (*Eine Philosophie konstituiert sich immer erst im Philosophieren*, 1976, 15). Yet, as everything else of this world, philosophy carries a beginning with it. It answers to something. Concerning the outer contours of this ‘something’, the incitement of philosophical reflection in the present investigation stems from the institutional settings of a critical academic study. It is not that this premise equals the premise for asking what thinking is, or what religion is, but the fact of the academic position housing my inquiry sets certain limits, the roots of which run deeper than I may be able to comprehend. Furthermore, in my asking what religion is, I speak from assumptions belonging to a cultural background, the history of which is, at least partly, a history of its religious heritage. Thus, what I speak *of* has to some degree provided the framework *from* which I speak. Only to a certain degree, of course, since I would not want to subscribe to a monolithic understanding of culture. Parts of culture stand in a critical relationship to other parts without being determined by a cultural totality as such. This is perhaps even one of the characteristic features of Western thought. Since the beginning of its history, the Christian tradition of the West – and I am conscious of speaking as a member of a Western society – has gone through an intricate process of self-interpretation by which it has promoted – as well as parted from – itself, a process which can perhaps best be described as a dialectics between self-renunciation and self-confirmation.



Thomas Aquinas, for instance, was in all likelihood driven by the attempt to sustain a purely theological discourse when making a distinction between ‘*what* God is’, as a matter for faith and theological reflection, and ‘*that* God is’, as a matter for philosophical or scientific demonstration. Little may he have foreseen the consequences of thus disavowing theology’s privilege of *knowing*. If, as tradition has it, he regarded philosophy as ‘theology’s handmaid’, it was actually for the price of shifting the matter of knowledge – though regarded as less important than the matter of faith – from the hands of the master to those of the servant. In due course, however, the servant should prove stronger and more rebellious than the Dominican friar was able to imagine. Contrariwise, Kant put all his *faith* in a principle of critique (belonging to a purely judgmental capacity of reason) that allowed him – or rather philosophy – to allocate theology a position from which it were to *serve* reason by the mere means of inspiration and motivation.<sup>33</sup> Confirmation turns into renunciation whereupon this renunciation returns as confirmation. Faith becomes reason; reason becomes faith.<sup>34</sup>

Nietzsche knew well that Athens and Jerusalem shared an ascetic ideal which through the movements of Platonism and Christianity grew into a relentless, self-sacrificing will to truth (W, II, 839 ff). As Foucault has subsequently pointed out in copious detail (1978), the culture of the occident has to a very large extent been formed by an ongoing struggle to monopolize the right and power to speak the truth. Unable to resist the temptation to do the same on my own part, while acknowledging the obligation to account for the plausibility of what I am saying (including the former paragraph and taking plausibility to be a current form – i.e., currency – of approaching ‘truth’), I acknowledge the lack of any transcendental, let alone transcendent, foothold. Thus, I will have to proceed with definitions of ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’ that serve to establish a platform for my investigation without claiming any *a priori* justification. Differently put, the conceptual ‘clearing’ is accompanied by realizing that the suggested platform may be different from the unacknowledged birthplace of its own conception, that is, from the situated enterprise of defining. To repeat a truism, which is nonetheless significant, we cannot see ourselves seeing! The only way I can think of in which to speak firmly, yet not too presumptuously, will be to insist on the required limits as mere *tools for framing* which are anything but random. If they reflect a situation that allows us to think, that is, to transgress repetition without opening the gate for pure imagination, they can be said to pass a test of reasonable, non-metaphysical justification, and they may even fold back upon themselves, as it were, revealing their own limitation without severing the supporting branch. The important task is to secure a firm stand that doesn’t prevent us from

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. the religion of the church being a ‘mainspring’ (*Triebfeder*) for the activity of reason, Kant 1968 (Vorrede, 1793), 1; *MdS*, A 181.

<sup>34</sup> As I read Wittgenstein’s remark on the faith invested in modern science (TLP 6.371–6.372) it can be taken to point in the same direction, see later (p. 34).

listening. But sound travels, even light does, which means that we will have be *some-where* for something to even *reach* us.

## 2.2 The Concept of Philosophy

I wish to say – or commit myself to saying – that philosophy is a place to stand where everything that exists *occupies us by way of concepts*. If philosophy tries to reach further (or to retreat into the dark origins of personal inclinations), it becomes something other than philosophy. It becomes mysticism or *theology* (in the ancient sense of the word).<sup>35</sup> Granted that philosophy commits itself to the communication of thoughts, it is not the impulse of emotion or experience that makes these thoughts philosophical, but rather their conceptual clarification. Inasmuch as a philosophy works from the premises of available concepts, even when laboring to beget new ones, it cannot transgress them positively, as, for instance, by locating the nature of an inner feeling or judging something to be of a transcendent nature.<sup>36</sup> When philosophy speaks of transgression it speaks of transgression *as a concept*. Even when it speaks of the transgression *of* concepts, or transgressing conceptuality as such (as in Nancy's fabulation of the coming-to-be of language), it speaks *of, with, and in* concepts. Philosophy cannot escape the condition of its own possibility. But it can be more or less aware of this condition. Although it goes without saying that philosophy can speak of everything there is in the conceptual form of 'everything there is', it does not entail that *philosophy is all there is*.

Philosophy should abstain from speaking the truth, if truth means that we have finally come to transcend the boundaries of language. Science may be permitted to speak the truth in this sense, while bearing in mind that it only states something within a restricted frame of available data (whatever their nature) with which it has established an objectively testable relationship. Philosophy, on the other hand, engages in the kind of practice it takes to conceive of the meaning and implication of notions that exist as notions, for instance, the notion of testability, and that which *makes* matters matter at all. That no test is available for the 'verification' of this enterprise – other than the enterprise itself – is the recognition that brought logical empiricism, or modern positivism, to its downfall. Thus, non-positivist philosophy will have

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<sup>35</sup> As a matter of fact, I would like to regard modern theology as entirely parallel to philosophy in this respect, but contrary to philosophy, the horizon of 'a last reality' (or a 'Hinterwelt') may still hold its sway over theology.

<sup>36</sup> Even when Heidegger, in the last sentence of *What is called thinking?* (*Was heisst Denken?*), asks of our thinking whether or not it is able to receive and take care of the original gift of Being by entrusting it to language (in continuation of the Greek λέγειν), he concludes an investigation which has all the way through spoken of, and even *from* within, the content of concepts, aiming for "the original speech of language", 1968, 244.

to give up on trying to grasp the final nature of things, that is, the inclination to decide whether something is ‘really real’ or not, or whether something is, in the end, ‘immanent’ or ‘transcendent’.<sup>37</sup> It will have to stay content with clarifying implications fostered by the *concept* of the real and the *conceptual* distinction between immanence and transcendence. When philosophy does speak of transcendence, either in theological or scientific metaphysics, it might (or should) be seen merely to acknowledge the force of basic concepts, constitutive of some particular commitment, without which too many notions would lack an integrating foundation. If metaphysics is regarded in this sense, that is, as a kind of gravitation-field within the network of concepts and conceptualizations, there should be plenty of room for it in philosophy. If, on the other hand, metaphysics is acknowledged to include an unrevisable reference, either exempted from the course of history, from the constraints of language or from the criteria of testability, it falls outside the discourse of philosophy. In this case, philosophy can only *conceptualize* it as an article of faith, but it is unable to *share* it. By this I may seem to imply that philosophy is free of faith. Of course, it is not. In order for it to be philosophy it has to have faith in itself, in its own conceptual proceedings, though faith is, by definition, irreducible to that *which it is faith in*. As I cannot philosophically ground my own grounding of philosophy, I therefore admit to merely commit myself to a certain view of philosophy. I do not claim to speak from a point of view above contingent inclinations.

I am well aware that this shortly outlined demarcation of a subject area *for* philosophy can be criticized as being too restrictive, but I should not hesitate to meet this criticism with the apparently cheap counter-allegation that any such critique not only depends on the use of concepts, but is also born from the very condition of conceptualization it may regard as problematic. My main point is that we have to be careful not to conflate the question of the ‘real’ incitement to philosophize, that is, the dimness of the impulse, with the basically communicative activity of *doing* philosophy. That there is certainly more to our lives than this self-indulgent undertaking should not seduce us to dream up a philosophy for all that there is to everything. And yet, philosophy deals with ‘all there is to everything’.

Setting the limits for the work that philosophy is expected to do in the following investigation is not the same as offering a positive definition. Given that philosophy seeks clarification at a conceptual level, we will have to be as clear as possible about the prospects of this enterprise. Clarification of concepts is no simple matter for the simple reason that concepts are anything but steady and finalized entities. Rather they tend to retreat from the grasp of conception in much the same way as the part of my neck I am trying to get a glimpse of by turning my head between mirrors. Whereas the field of vision depends on the angle between the mirrors, the availability

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37 This claim should not be read as a variation of the Ding-an-Sich, but rather as abandoning the need for this metaphysical limit.

of conceptual meaning depends on the conceptual framework of trying to locate it. In other words, concepts are slippery, their elusiveness generated by the fact of their ongoing use. A philosophy which, in line with what is generally called the linguistic turn, concedes to the pragmatic conditions of the meaning of words, not only realizes its own communicative commitment but also the 'infinite semiosis' belonging to the exchange of words.

One of Charles Sanders Pierce's lasting insights was probably that 'meaning' is not something inhabited by signs, let alone by the systematic relations between them. What signs inhabit is only the logical structure that makes it possible for meaning to *happen* in given situations. Nonetheless, the act of interpretation, implied by the event of communication, is anything but an arbitrary matter. Communication of meaning is possible. Yet, meaning as such is never exhausted. We can, strictly speaking, *mean* the same thing, either by speaking *of* the same thing or coming to agreement with one another about what to do in a certain situation, but if 'meaning' as such is only realized in the event of communication, there is always a future possibility to consider when it comes to *the potentials* of meaning. The event of 'meaning' never comes to an end as long as there is an exchange of signs, that is, signs used to represent something for someone in a given situation. What we should learn from Pierce is to keep this immanent surplus of meaning in mind without subscribing to linguistic relativism. The point of Pierce's pragmatic semiotics is certainly not that any sign can mean anything, but that meaning is engendered by, and emerges from, *the use of signs*. In the present attempt to define philosophy, I draw on this pragmatic understanding of language, implying that the meaning potential of 'concept' includes *conceptions* and *conceptualizations* as well as all other implications of practice involved in the formation and use of signs and concepts. However, stating this, I have already plunged myself into the practice I try to define, confirming Tugendhat's point that philosophy is only constituted in philosophizing.

Contrary to positivism (which is thus regarded as a position that has lost its philosophical credibility), the philosophical investigation carried out in this book does not rest on the implication that empirical data speak for themselves, and contrary to most theoretical approaches it doesn't proceed from the premise of a single explanatory framework. Rather, it aims to get a clearer notion of the space between data, fact, and interpretation, not necessarily as a problematic or metaphysical void opening up in the interstices, but rather as a place of practical interaction of which it already takes part itself. As for theories, they are not only philosophically interesting on account of the explanations they offer, but also as a kind of engagement with the world, including a lot of taking-for-granted concepts (and conceptions) which are anything but self-evident (to philosophy). Some would perhaps object that what it takes to deal with this remaining problematic is meta-theory, the theory of theory, and not some loose speculation. Yet, far from engaging in any loose speculation (although the risk is, of course, imminent), I would want to adhere to a kind of philosophy that works from the opposite direction. Instead of taking God's point of view or speaking from

‘the nowhere’ of scientism, which amount to one and the same thing epistemologically speaking, philosophy, as I conceive of it, carves its way out from within the matter of investigation, as it were. It renounces the dream of attaining a final comprehensive perspective; the contemplation it seeks is no longer that of *theoria*, but that of pragmatically informed self-reflection. It goes without saying that I don’t (and can’t) speak on behalf of philosophy in general, as if I had reached the privileged point of view just denounced. Rather, I advocate for a kind of conceptual investigation which is something other than theoretical or meta-theoretical, yet still claiming the right and ability to be critical and clarifying. Only the actual work will show whether or not I shall succeed in this.

### 2.3 The Concept of Religion

We cannot proceed towards new perspectives for philosophy of religion without having, at least in some preliminary way, defined the concept of religion. However, advancing a philosophical definition of religion is no straightforward matter. One feasible route might be to investigate conceptually how ‘religion’ is being used – and has been used – in various contexts, but although such clarification is of paramount importance, it leaves something very crucial to be desired, namely a critical standard allowing us to distinguish use from misuse, unless even this objective is skeptically abandoned. However, the venture of simply collecting various uses of the ‘term’ would be equal to exchanging a philosophical definition with a purely sociological one, in which case we would, at least, need some philosophical justification for settling on this. Instead, we may want to search for standards that allow us to determine an illegitimate use of ‘religion’. Such an endeavor might be met with the suspicion that we are in search for no less than a substantial definition of religion and therefore need theoretical tools rather than philosophical clarification, but I do not think the matter is as simple as that. While I shall return to the difference between theory and philosophy below, I shall for the moment restrict myself to make some demarcations.

Although it bears repeating that philosophy is not suited to work with simple objectifications, I am also disinclined to engage in the increasingly common, and seemingly pragmatic, attempt to work out an extensive definition of religion by gathering an indiscriminate – and preferably global – conglomerate of criss-crossing uses of the word ‘religion’ (cf. Alston, 1967, 141 f; Byrne, 1988, 10; Salor, 1993, 227). What is at stake here is that Wittgenstein’s point about family resemblances are twisted into being criteria for a working definition superposed to counterbalance ethnocentric presumptions.<sup>38</sup> I do not think that such objective, if feasible at all, is reached

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<sup>38</sup> Thus, Salor admits that his notion of religion is influenced, at the outset, by Western monotheism, but that the task for an historian of religion is to stay open to “the families of religion” around the

by a quantitative method alone,<sup>39</sup> but regardless of other merits of having an ‘open’ definition, it departs profoundly from the point Wittgenstein was making. Wittgenstein did not speak about definitions, but tried to make us realize that, in general, we don’t use words on the grounds of substantial meanings. Rather, we denote aspects of meaning which emerge from the use of words and are thus dependent on contextual interrelations. This mutability of meaning, as it were, is not without restraint, but contained by grammar (in Wittgenstein’s sense), rules, and language games. Only in specific cases, such as in scientific terminology, does it make sense to regard meaning as exhausted by immediate reference. However, this scientific privilege, as it were, may create the more general expectation that it is possible, and desirable, to have definitions which focus on how things really are (i.e., not only aspects, according to a certain point of view, but the essential nature according to a view from ‘nowhere’). Such broader inclinations aside, science functions as a game, in which definitions play a rather restricted role. Either we start from some positive given we strive to know more about, and the question of definition is, more than anything else, a question of how to match the *explanandum* with the *explananda*. Or it may be (as in the case of religion being the subject matter) that the definition is part of the problem we set out to solve. In this latter respect, we may, as scientists, be all the more concerned about the premises on which our investigation rests, and ask for the secure foundation, the vocabulary (including basic statements), and methods, by which we look for certain answers to certain questions. Even so we may be conscious of the limitations stemming from our theory, either in the minimal sense or having something *in view* (i.e., selecting data) or in the more fully hypothetical sense of suggesting a frame of interpretation which is open to possible refutation. As for the concepts and methods engaged by our exploration, we may want to delimit the range of explanatory power accordingly. Reflections and precautions such as these are well served when it comes to the scientific enterprise (and the study of religion *as a* scientific study), though in philosophy (and accordingly in the philosophy of religion) the delimitations thus

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world and learn to work with “unbounded analytical categories”, op.cit. 254 ff. Alston, who wants to take a wide range of “religion making characteristics” into account, nevertheless takes his point of departure in an “ideally clear case of religion” (op.cit. 142), and thus stands guilty of a *petitio principii* if his objective is to define ‘religion’ as such (though the problem Alston toys with is the possible extension of the concept rather than any ‘core’ definition). Byrne, on his part, uses the notion of ‘family resemblance’ as an argument against essentialism, although this point loses some of its poignancy when, at the same time, he wants to speak about human behavior as having “an ‘inside’ as well as in ‘outside’” (op.cit. 21), as if he had some special access to what is genuinely religion inside our heads (or our hearts, as it were). Be that as it may, the point Byrne wants to draw from Wittgenstein is that cultural phenomena are much more complex than natural phenomena and that this calls for more open-ended definitions. As I read Wittgenstein, nothing could be farther from the point *he* wanted to make.

39 Thus I have to admit that I don’t share Knepper’s faith in a quantitative method as programmatic for a new and more broadly conceived philosophy of religion, cf. Knepper, 2013, 26 ff.

established would exactly beg the question of ‘why’, and ‘with what consequences’, we would want to install them in the first place? In science we look for an object to be picked out, so to speak, from the whole of reality; in philosophy we may take a halt before this objectification and wonder about it. Thus, other questions are likely to be raised such as: How come we strive for this objectification? What do we want with it? What place does it take up in our lives, how does it reflect – or help creating – our notion of reality? How does it reflect our being in the world?

A couple of years before Martin Heidegger began working on *Sein und Zeit*, he held a series of lectures at Freiburg university on phenomenology of religion, in which respect he reflected on the relationship between religion and philosophy (conceived entirely as phenomenology). The question was, according to Heidegger, whether the philosophical engagement with religion actually grows out of religion itself or whether it is rather the phenomenon of religion which is pressed into being an object for various philosophical approaches (GA 60, 27)? The question resonates of Schelling’s methodological reflections on myth (1965) but digs even deeper into asking about the nature of our actual concern (*Bekümmern*). The essential difference between science and philosophy, Heidegger claims, lies in the manner of our engagement with a subject matter. In a scientific approach to religion we decide on objectifying criteria that make certain human concerns detectable as religious. In philosophy we turn around, as it were, in order to fasten our gaze on the very concern involving this act of objectification.<sup>40</sup> What we are concerned with, among other things, in science is to gain universal knowledge. This implies an indirect concern with history, namely that we might transgress it by understanding something ahistorical. At the same time, however, we may be concerned *about* history, inasmuch as we are aware that our search for universal knowledge takes place in it. This confronts us with two options: either we seek to understand history theoretically as, for instance, from a certain transcendental point of view, or we acknowledge the historical embedment, or situatedness, of our theoretical stance. Following the latter path, Heidegger finds that the specific task of understanding religion must follow from the way in which philosophy understands itself – that is, its own motive – on the grounds of a ‘factic life experience’ (*faktische Lebenserfahrung*, op.cit. 34).<sup>41</sup> In philosophy’s attempt to come to grips with the historical condition of its own questioning, Heidegger lays out three ways in which history has been understood: 1) The Platonic solution that does away with the reality of history altogether by referring to a higher order of immutable being, 2) the solution of cultural philosophy, as conceived, for instance, by Spengler, that abandons the ideal of norms in exchange for historical destiny, and 3) the neo-

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<sup>40</sup> Heidegger thus aggravates the “need of philosophy to be ever turning upon the preliminary questions so much, and to keep it before your eyes so relentlessly, that it will in fact become a virtue”, cf. Kiesel, 1993, 151.

<sup>41</sup> I thus follow Theodore Kiesel’s translation of *faktische Lebenserfahrung* (1993, 104).



Kantian solution that settles on a balance between absolute values and their concrete realization relative to a historical situation (op.cit. 48). From the point of view of life itself, this tripartite division of ways corresponds with 1) a reaction against history, 2) a yielding to its flow, and 3) an attempt to secure a way out (op.cit. 50). In Heidegger's eyes, science, including philosophy as science, is involved in the concern for establishing a place of security beyond the rupture of time. However, to take the point of departure *in this very concern* rather than in the objective ensuing from it is what differentiates phenomenology from science. An investigation of religion that does not forget the constitutive role of its own concern is rather philosophical than theoretical. Inasmuch as a phenomenology of religion is not only concerned *with* its 'object', but also *about* it, it confronts itself by confronting religion. As a reaction to seeking security beyond the contingencies of human existence, i.e., the conditions of history, time, and mortality, Heidegger promulgates a philosophy that takes halt at the concern (*Bekümmern*) itself, facing the disquietude (*Beunruhigung*) that follows inescapably from life's reality (*Lebenswirklichkeit*) (op.cit. 51). As we are going to see, Wittgenstein hits a similar note in his remarks on *The Golden Bough* by James George Frazer (chapter 4.6).

Realizing that scientific objection basically stems from a concern with reality, that is, with a determination *of* reality, we may, on this account, appreciate the similarity with myths and rituals as well as with dogmatic traditions. Paramount to what concerns us as humans in these various forms of life is to come to grips with the natural surroundings and our place in them, to cope with them as best we can, and, not least, to regard them as a meaningful whole. It goes without saying that the difference between the scientific and the non-scientific orientations is far more conspicuous than the likeness. In science the meaning of the whole becomes the 'meaning' of nature as detached from 'meaning' as a cultural product, whereas in 'mythical' worldviews, and often in 'higher religions' as well, everything is included in the same totality of meaning. I think Habermas makes an intriguing point, in this respect, by understanding myth be to 'the world' *as* a picture in contrast to science which is rather a picture *of* the world (1981, I, 85). For Habermas, who in this respect borrows his scheme of thought from Robin Horton and Karl Popper (op.cit. 96 ff), learning processes are precluded in a mythical worldview insofar as this doesn't regard itself as a view at all. In the repetition of myth, that is, every time a holistic narrative of the past is told, the world is rather created, that is, revoked internally,<sup>42</sup> than referred to in its external presence. In a mythical tradition, so Habermas argues, any linguistic *reference* to the world is bound by the totalizing power of primitive thought, 'la pensée sauvage', by which he thinks especially of a system of relations

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<sup>42</sup> The aspect of creation or production is denoted in the Greek word ποιησις (*poesis*) as pertaining to the traditional poets such as Homer and Hesiod.



between similarities and contrasts.<sup>43</sup> This implies that there are no external criteria for the account to be true or false. What is true is determined by nothing but tradition itself.<sup>44</sup> Myth, therefore, presents a confusion of nature and culture (1981, I, 79). Only when it is realized that language is a medium of *representing* the world rather than a reflection of its immediate *presence*, does a worldview become open to critical revision, independent of the world-projecting power of myth (op.cit. 83).<sup>45</sup> Learning-processes emerge and the way is paved, in principle, for scientific development. Although Habermas does not speak about this development in evolutionary terms, and only attempts to reconstruct the communicative logics of actual processes that have already taken place, I still think, along with G.E.R. Lloyd (1990), that his narrative is implausibly neat.

But let us return, for now, to the concept of meaning. It is uncontroversial, I guess, to speak of myths and dogmas as ‘systems of meaning’. Yet to speak of a scientific world view as meaningful begs the question of what we then mean by meaning. There are several conceptual issues at stake here. For one thing, we might want to distinguish, as Frege did, between ‘*Sinn*’ and ‘*Bedeutung*’, that is, between ‘meaning’ as internal to sentences and ‘reference’ as the ostensive use of a word (or a sentence), while realizing that the latter use depends on the former (as Wittgenstein has shown, PI, § 1–3). In this basic sense, a scientific worldview is just as meaningful as everything else. Of course, what *this* means is merely that the meaning of sentences is not induced by the world, but representative of it by way of their use and, of course, as belonging to a semantic system of possible agreement between their users. Taken in another sense, one might say that defining reality on the premises of this predicative and denotative system (as submitted to empirical criteria of meaning, such as the positivists would like to have it, for instance) empties the world of expressive meaning, in which respect, however, ‘meaning’ certainly means something different. The question is: Different in what sense? I do not want to say that sciences of today are the gods of yesterday. What I am getting at is that our engagement with the world takes place

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**43** In this respect, Habermas refers (1981, I, 76) with unmitigated approval to the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1958; 1962) while in other respects, he launches a harsh critique against the disengaged position of the observer (*Beobachter*) in social, sciences, and surely, Lévi-Strauss is one of those who is thought of as taking up such a position. My guess is that when it comes to mythical thinking, Habermas likes to think that the potentials of communicative reason are inhibited by sacred norms which means that no mutual standards for coming to agreement commits us to a more dialogical relationship. I tend to disagree on grounds that shall be unearthed later on.

**44** This was realized early on among the Greeks who therefore were greatly concerned about criteria for distinguishing between ‘true’ and ‘false’, see below, chapter 4.7.

**45** Exactly this realization is what is found, for instance, in Plato, *Res.Publ.* 414c. Yet even as early as in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Hecataeus objected to the laughable plurality of local myths which he aimed to subdue by telling the truth to the best of his knowledge, fr. 1.

in the world and thus cannot be regarded as detached from a form of life, or factic life, in Heidegger's terms. Even this very *regard*, however, that is, even the reflection of our engagement with the world, is an engagement with the world. And thus it seems that 'the world' is swallowed up in the very act of representing it. But am I not saying then that the world doesn't exist apart from its location in the conceptual system? Not at all. My point is just that science misunderstands itself if it regards its linguistic embeddedness as inconsequential with respect to the facts it communicates. That science is a symbolic system doesn't mean that its relation to nature (i.e., that which is defined by language as non-linguistic) is arbitrary. If it were, it would certainly beg the question why we have become so much better through the ages to force this nature to serve our ends. Habermas is right that the consciousness of the limitation of language is not only a condition of possibility for, but also an impetus to, the development of learning processes. Yet, even this consciousness doesn't escape the boundaries of language. What it does is that it introduces a self-deficiency in language that seemingly allows the world to speak but, paradoxically, this self-deficiency is, at the same time, a self-elevation (or a self-promotion), and the world remains a field of language, though in crucial respects a different one. It bears repeating that it would be absurd to claim that the 'world' could be reducible to 'language' if both terms are taken in their referential meaning (of '*Bedeutung*'). Yet, there would be no world as *Bedeutung* if it were not for presence of the world as *Sinn*. To repeat a phrase from Walter Benjamin: "The linguistic being of things is their language", and thus "there is no such thing as a content of language" (1996, 64).<sup>46</sup>

Language expresses what is communicable, no more, no less (op.cit. 66). It might seem to us, who already speak from naturalized view of the world, that mythical reality obtains its meaning from a system of symbols, whereas the system of symbols in a scientific discourse gets its sense from reality. But this is wrong-headed, and in this sense, Peter Winch was right in claiming that "[r]eality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has" (1999, 346). A precondition for making investigations into the workings of nature is that we have a concept of 'nature' and 'world', as well as all which such conceptions encapsulate.<sup>47</sup> It is evidently possible to revise our notions of these workings, and consequently adjust some aspects in our notion of the world. Yet, what it entails, seen from the point of view of language, is merely that some internal relations between concepts are rearranged and that new terms are added to the vocabulary in the course

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<sup>46</sup> I read Donald Davidson's rejection of a distinction between scheme and content (1984, 183 ff) as a similar recognition, and, if I am not mistaken, this is what Kevin Schilbrack tries to utilize in the conception of a religious metaphysics, 2014, 160; 168 ff.

<sup>47</sup> Thus, as Jean-Luc Nancy has pointed out, when we speak of a mythical worldview, we already speak from a point of view where 'world' and 'meaning' makes sense in a certain way that closes our access to myth, 1997, 6.

of time. Language is an open game, but a game nonetheless. Worldviews may undergo a revolution from time to time, but the linguistic and communicative means by which such circumventions takes place remain pretty much the same. The brains, and social interactions, that make the linguistic competence of human beings possible probably do not change much evolutionary speaking. And it is because of the perseverance of language, Wittgenstein says, that we are seduced us to ask the same philosophical questions over and over again (CV, 15e).

It appears that I have taken a rather long detour in order to repeat an elaborated version of my initial point, hopefully reinforced by now, namely, that neither myth nor science is a way of mastering, practically as well as cognitively, a purely external reality, but both are ways in which this *external reality, including our human nature, is turned into a habitat by language*.

Long before Wittgenstein coined his concepts of 'language game' and 'life form', he wrote in the *Tractatus* that:

The whole modern conception of the world [Weltanschauung] is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.

Thus people today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and both wrong: though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if everything were explained. (TLP 6.371–6.372)

Though Wittgenstein is not speaking about the *Weltanschauung* as a way of life, he does point to (human, cultural) relationships with the world in which science and religion share the attitude of awe. In both cases the attitudes are reified into mere reflections of reality, the difference being, however, that the scientific explanation, contrary to the religious adoration, negates the constitutive significance of its own *relationship* with its object.

These ruminations have not in themselves brought us any closer to a positive definition of religion, but they may nonetheless be relevant for shedding some light on the philosophical implications in such a definition.

Having thus brought scientific and non-scientific systems of meaning on an equal footing of human engagements with the world (a point that admittedly has a trivial ring to it), the time has come to look more deeply for decisive differences. Above, I took the point of departure from what seems to be at the farthest end from science on a discursive scale, namely myth. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1969), however, this is not so. Yet, what they had in mind was a notion of myth as the dialectic Other of the self-asserting principle of enlightened reason. Everything depends on the concepts we use. What Adorno traced in the heart of Greek myth, represented by Odysseus's return to the homeland of Ithaca, was a will to break free from the closed world of mythical powers. However, this was exactly the will that also made Odysseus a slave of his own subjectivity. He paid for the power over nature with the prize of losing

his soul to a world without a soul. This may be seen to reflect, though in reverse, Marx's statement of religion as being the opium of the people *by being the spirit in a world without spirit*.<sup>48</sup> Once the demystification (*Entzauberung*) of the world has taken effect on a large-scale cultural level (as Max Weber once pointed out), the world is irreversibly changed. A split between words and things, emerging in various forms of discourse, has taken up a profound residence in our general view of the world.<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that a mythical 'mentality' suddenly evaporated; far from it. It goes without saying that it lived and thrived in various contexts; I even venture to say that it is present today and probably always will be.

What changed over a long period of time, among the ancient Greeks and again in the Renaissance (with a more lasting force, as it seems), was an overall balance of credibility concerning the representation of the world. I am not speaking of elitist philosophers or early 'scientists' (*physiologoi*) in antiquity who often cloaked their notions in highly mystical terms, but of a shifting weight in using words of reference that took place, little by little, in various contexts through Classical Times (though put on hold in later centuries). It is integral to the argument I am making that it is impossible to pinpoint a time or a place where this became an accustomed view. Perhaps it happened so gradually that no one even noticed.<sup>50</sup> Be that as it may, I am reluctant to read too much into instances of open controversies between a religious tradition, on the one hand, and some other religious or scientific challenges, on the other. What I am interested in is rather the conditions of possibility for these controversies to take the form they took. In this respect, I realize that we can either search for such conditions in the universal mediums of human rationality, language, or some structural level of *l'esprit humain* (cf. Lévi-Strauss), or we can search for them in the medium of history, that is, in the medium of tradition, conflicts and changes. Without a final argument, which would in any case contradict itself, I am strongly inclined to do the latter. I thus commit myself to a view of *reason as being historically situated*. However,

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault emphasizes the latter (italicized) part of this statement as being the really noteworthy one, 2005, 255.

<sup>49</sup> To be exact, I am not speaking *of* the world in the same vein as when I venture to claim that the world can never be the same again, but it would only serve to blur, or trivialize, the matter if I were to use the modifying 'conception of the world' instead of the mere 'world', the point being that we normally don't live and think by such a distinction. The world in our heads and the world as exterior to our thoughts cannot be easily separated even though, of course, they are anything but identical. Another word for the remaining inseparability, however, is language.

<sup>50</sup> In my view, Michel Foucault (1966) has done a unique job, clearly inspired Gaston Bachelard and George Canguilhem, in unearthing the traits of shifting formations of knowledge in the history of science. Instead of taking his point of departure in the rationalizing self-understanding of the dominant discourses, he took pains to reconstruct, as is perhaps well known, the general conditions of possibility for the formation of knowledge, conditions that were presupposed as long as they were 'in command', as it were, and therefore only recognizable after their destabilization.

this implies that the definition of religion we may hope to obtain in a modern context cannot be cast in the mold of universality.

What religion is today, where it is already heavily influenced by the mere possibility of a scientific engagement with it, is something other than what it was yesterday on 'its' own conditions, so to speak. Religion is, as everything else, subject to time. When the concept of 'religion', stemming, as is well known, from the context of Roman culture in antiquity, attained an expanding force of representative inclusion, a new subject matter was produced. Thus far, I agree with the committed nominalists of today's comparative study of religion (as, for instance, Jonathan Z. Smith, Talal Asad, Russel T. McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald and Brent Nongbri) that 'religion' is anything but a neutral concept of some natural kind, i.e., self-identical entity in the world. There is no privileged information to gain from the etymology of the word, though it may be historically interesting in its own right, nor is there any point of view beyond history from which various phenomena are identifiable as variations of one and the same substantial category. Our view of religion is a historical view of a historical phenomenon. It would be a profound misunderstanding, however, to take this to imply that there can be nothing *that is essentially* religion. My disagreement with the nominalist party concerns this misunderstanding. In fact, I think they tend to make an essentialist mistake themselves, and even a self-contradicting one, by struggling to reduce the concept of 'religion' to relations of power (or the like).

There is, beyond any doubt, theological interests connected with a universalistic notion of religion in much of what is being done under the label of Religious Studies, especially in the US, but there are, just as well, interests to the contrary invested in the Comparative Studies of Religion. The neutral stand proclaimed by the latter betrays, at best, an unsatisfactory assumption that we should treat cultural phenomena as purely objective categories. This would mean one of two things: 1) either that the position from which they launch their critique of a theological agenda is itself exempt from the quagmire of historical power struggles, in which case the burden of proof concerning universalism (or essentialism) would shift on to their hands, or 2) they must realize that they are also enmeshed in a historical reality that leaves neither them nor anybody else any 'pure' object of investigation. But what does a neutral stance even mean? For one thing, it obviously implies that we are able to distinguish between 'is' and 'ought' in the context of cultural phenomena. To some extent it seems that we are. We can describe the ancient custom of killing a sacred king without paying any attention to our own moral inclinations against it. But does this amount to a scientific, let alone philosophical, understanding? Why trouble ourselves with describing customs like this? Do we want to simply understand humanity better by engaging in broadening a thick description of cultural variety? If so - why? What do we expect to gain from this understanding? Do we secretly anticipate that it might inspire us to change our own practices, our own view on responsibility, or even

our understanding of the powers of nature?<sup>51</sup> Or do we seek to confirm our own superiority in regard of our scientific and moral world view? Perhaps we might just engage in such studies out of simple curiosity, or even with a ‘passion for the real’ (to use an expression from Alain Badiou)? Regardless of these more or less probable reasons, the result of our work is anything but innocent or ‘neutral’.<sup>52</sup> By doing human sciences, we *produce* culture, we *engage* in culture, and we engage in the *determination* of reality (and accordingly, perhaps, in the *termination* of some other reality. Some would call it an inevitable metaphysics.<sup>53</sup> I would settle for less and merely speak of a worldview<sup>54</sup>, or background assumptions, which can in part, and in turn, be criticized and revised, yet never *in toto*. The basic point, however, is that cultural science can never be neutral; it is – and will always be – part of the world-habitation we make for ourselves. This is in no way meant as a *cart blanche* for projecting all sorts of values onto the object of investigation, but is rather an exhortation to be aware of the kind of relation it represents.<sup>55</sup>

I am disinclined, however, to frame this point along the lines of a Gadamarian sense of interpretation directed at a fusion of horizons. I contend that the attempt to secure a scientific stance (pertaining to ‘enlightened’ reason and various kinds of positivism) free of any kind of prejudice betrays a prejudice of its own (cf. Gadamer, 1972, 256 f). But I am reluctant to endorse his notion of ‘matter’ (*Sache*) as something which presents us with a truth-event (*Wahrheitsgeschehen*) by means of a historical dialectics. I take a more Foucauldian stance regarding the very pursuit of a given ‘matter’ as being already conditioned historically. However, I am aware that pushing a historical critique too far faces the risk of undermining itself. For the same reason,

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51 I tend to think the recommendation to take animism seriously, as propounded by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2011, 128 ff), and followed up by Rane Willerslev (2013, 42), points in that direction.

52 The marks of reservation point to the paradoxical nature of the concept of neutrality, which stands in anything than a neutral stance to its implied opposite. The concept of neutrality may be used unambiguously, though, as, for instance, in a case of arbitration, where a third party engages in a controversy between two other parties without sharing their interests. But this is clearly not the case in a science of religion which is an interested party in the ‘dispute about reality’, as it were. My disinclination to regard evaluation as principally distinct from description also put me at odds with Schilbrack’s view that “evaluation presupposes and waits upon accurate description”, 2014, 186. I must admit that I was once taken aback when the British philosopher of religion Brian Hebblethwaite assured me that ‘the right prescription follows from the right description’ in regard of the validity of religious belief and practice. But I have come to admit a greater amount of interdependence than I used to.

53 See, for instance, Schilbrack, 2014, 163 ff.

54 See, however, Heidegger’s ponderings about the intricate relationship between philosophy and a worldview (*Weltanschauung*, GA 56/57, 10), by which he introduces his thoughts about philosophy as a primary form of science, op.cit. 13 ff.

55 In this respect I fully agree with Schilbrack, op.cit. 21.

I am not too happy with the strategic ‘empiricism’ of the early Foucault which, though intriguingly – and perhaps in some respects fruitfully – unsettling, dismisses the hermeneutic condition of historical interpretation.

Foucault objected to what he thought of as a general hermeneutic commitment to a belief in self-contained secresies of meaning. But this was certainly not what Gadamer regarded as the object of understanding. Rather he saw the unfolding of meaning as a continuous, dialectic process between present and past, that is, the workings of a tradition that never remains identical with – nor completely estranged from – itself. And Gadamer is right on this point. We cannot escape the conditions of interpretation. I doubt that Foucault ever believed we could. I rather tend to think that he regarded the interpretative attitude as a historically conditioned way of safeguarding a notion of the conscious human self with an unimpeded access to itself (including the practice of confession as well as the autonomy of reason). He took pains to demonstrate this contingency in a genealogical narrative that served to draw a picture (employing a lot of almost tiresome historical detail) of how we understand ourselves as subjects (epistemic as well as moral), formed by historical and social circumstances, rather than by some self-reflection beyond constraints of historical and mortal existence. Without wishing to diminish the force of this argument, which I indeed take to be a strong one, I do not think it can stand alone. Perhaps Foucault just pretended it to be an interactive gesture, but if he meant it to state something *true* as well, it would appeal to more than it could deliver. To regard ourselves as historically contingent beings, or ‘forms of subjectivity’ (*assujettissement*) to use Foucault’s own expression, can only be justified by admitting, at the same time, *some* rational access to a medium of universality, however limited it may be. Otherwise there would be no reason to take the archaeological and genealogical demonstrations seriously. The problem is, though, that we can never be positive as to what this universality exactly comes down to, apart from the conditions of earthly being (which are trivial) and language (which is non-trivial).

I cannot help but think that Habermas is right in holding that we must always stay committed to the better argument, whatever kind of interpretation is involved, if we want to justify our beliefs and actions rationally. But I am more reluctant, as was Gadamer, to follow Habermas in defending the rationalizing principle of separating discursive *form* from discursive *content*. It is probably meant to be communicatively reassuring, but it may, in fact, be unintentionally dominating, especially when it comes to a religious discourse where form and content are inseparably entangled. In Habermas’ eyes this is what makes a religious, or mythical (to be more exact), discourse a ‘Sonder-diskurs’, that is, a kind of discourse which is closed to the possibility of coming to agreement on non-authoritarian premises. However, it is Habermas’ view which is question-begging here. As we shall see below, adopting Wittgenstein’s view of understanding, it may be possible to acknowledge the mutual dependency of form and content without bowing to an unassailable power of discourse (as in sacred norms or positivist reference). These reservations aside, Habermas may still be justi-



fied in holding that the special inseparability of form and content which makes up a mythical worldview *allows us* to regard it as a confusion of nature and culture. For the same reason Habermas regards the mythical worldview as constituting a closed circle and the linguistic means for communicative action to lie in chains, as it were, held captive by the sacred norms of tradition. But this is an attitude which is as non-interpretative as that of Foucault and the 'structuralists', when they endeavor to locate conditions of meanings in principles or mechanisms which are unconscious or inaccessible to the participants themselves, including rationalist philosophers. The main difference is that the kind of universality, Habermas advocates for, involves the dialogical *prospect* of 'mutual understanding' between the involved parties, whereas the sheer third person perspective (of the *Beobachter*) does not. Yet, if the rational nature of the mutual understanding (*Verständigung*), Habermas has in mind cannot be demonstrated empirically, but only in argument, it places his empirical notion of myth (adopted mainly from Lévi-Strauss) in a somewhat awkward position. If, instead, we regard this notion as the consequence of admitting to be unable to communicate with a mythical worldview (rather than representing a purely third person perspective), it is still determined negatively and, therefore, by way of dominance. Myth has become reason's Other, much like madness (*la folie*) in the history of its treatment, if we ask Foucault (1989). What I am driving at, placing myself between the unavoidable condition of interpretation, on the one side, and the historical situatedness, on the other, is the possibility of regaining access to mythical thinking, not in order to re-live it (as Dilthey would), or re-appropriate its intellectual content (as Schelling may have hoped for), but in order to transcend its pure negativity instigated by science and communicative reason.<sup>56</sup>

But even if this 'open' position would be possible (in whatever way imaginable), it would only bring us half the way towards a definition of religion. The consequence of categorizing myth the way Habermas and others do is that it becomes a model *for* some sort of stable worldview rather than a representation of historical events

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<sup>56</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy is far less 'optimistic' inasmuch as he regards it as "a total waste of time to try to rediscover, behind the logos that has governed our twenty-five centuries, something like a 'mythical' dimension or sense", 1997, 6. In other words: there is no mythical worldview available to us behind logos inasmuch as it is part of logos' construction of its own opposite. This thought is clearly reminiscent of a view already presented by G.E.R. Lloyd (1990) in relation to the specific Greek context. However, whereas Lloyd actually points out a new way of 'discoursing' in Classical Times (which still leaves something different behind which we might be able to call 'mythos' regardless of the way in which the Greeks themselves used this concept), Nancy takes his cue from the loss of a 'sense of the world' in general. The level on which this may be 'significant' (though already intrinsically problematic) is, however, difficult to hold on to in practice. Thus, Nancy violates his self-imposed reservation by actually speaking about myth as "a road of presented, recited sense" and that "immediate identity of sense and truth", which breaks down through the birth of philosophy, 1997, 20.



and processes susceptible to changes.<sup>57</sup> That a mythical tradition might be relatively more resistant towards external influence than other discursive systems does in no way imply that no changes or developments ever take place in ‘mythical societies’.<sup>58</sup> Yet, what I am interested in here is not to build a concept of religion on top of that of myth, but try to work out the restrictions (or mechanisms of exclusions, as Foucault might say) imposed on the subject by its scientific investigation, the specific case being, of course, the study of religion. Yet, I have taken my point of departure in a philosophical reflection on language and the general conditions of being (in the world) as an abstracting distancing of the lived forms of these conditions in myth. Another question is whether a philosophy of religion can rest content with a notion of myth as a closed symbolic system of contrast and similarity? Are we to regard myth in the ancient world as a cultural monopoly, preventing modern interpreters from really understanding it and interacting with it?

It is my contention that our general, and secularized, commitment to criteria of empirical reference and evidence, as well as the concept of truth related to it in more or less sophisticated ways, severely hampers our appreciating not only of ancient cultures, but of similar inclinations in ourselves. But I hold, at the same time, that a philosophy of religion may have ways to dodge this condition without violating its own overall commitment to a scientifically informed worldview. I will return to the specific questions of ‘reference’, ‘evidence’ and ‘truth’ with respect to their significance for comprehending – and defining – religion (cf. chapter 54), but for now only hint at another type of approach.

An object of investigation emerges out of an *interested* engagement with it, a concern to understand, but what constitutes a concern to understand? Understanding may lead to a better control, manipulation, tolerance, critique, or emancipation. Any of these prospects may be present in the investigation of religion (which is not, however, a disqualifying condition, but simply a condition we have to keep in mind).<sup>59</sup> What differs in respect of the philosophical approach to religion (such as the one argued for in this book) is that the objectifying gaze (which is, to some degree, inevitable) is returned upon itself as by a mirror. The philosophical conceptualization of religion does not merely see an object, but beholds itself beholding this object, or may even, in some sense, visualize itself being *seen by it*. Having said that, I subscribe to the view, espoused by Habermas, that a philosophy which makes itself *dependent* on the ‘occurrences’ (*Geschicken*) of revelation is no longer a philosophy (2001, 192).

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<sup>57</sup> Let us, once again, remind ourselves of Geertz’s classical distinction between ‘the model of’ and ‘the model for’, 1993, 93.

<sup>58</sup> The current interest in the developments through the Axial Age as it is brought out, for instance, in Robert Bellah’s last opus (2011) has brought a general attention to this.

<sup>59</sup> I am referring here to debate between Timothy Fitzgerald and Steven Engler, cf. Fitzgerald, 2011, and Engler, 2011a, 2011b.

A philosophy of religion which is something other than a religious philosophy cannot assume a religious language, but will have to express what it may learn from religion in a discourse independent of revealed truth (op.cit. 191). Even Walter Benjamin, whose thinking generally discounts the customary borders between aesthetics, theology and philosophy, holds, in one of his early texts, that “[t]he question of existence raised by religion, art, and so on can also play a role philosophically, but only on the path of inquiry into the philosophical knowledge of such existence” (SW, I, 10). But if philosophy is, by principle, independent of a religious or an aesthetic expression of existence, can it also claim for itself a similar independence of science? Here we will have to differentiate between, on the one hand, scientific results the validity of which depends on methodological adequacy rather than philosophical insights, and, on the other hand, the reductive simplification that serves an operative objectification but which may eventually turn into premises for the determination of the real (hiding from itself a *passion* for the real, as Badiou would say). Philosophy has no gainsay in respect of the former, but is not committed to the latter. Objectification does not work in philosophy as a given method, but rather constitutes a matter for reflexive scrutiny, and that makes a philosophical definition of religion an admittedly difficult and self-involving issue. Thus, it seems that philosophy should ask itself about its own interest in religion, or rather in defining religion, but how can it define something the nature of which is dependent on its own interests while, at the same time, religion is thought to be something for philosophy to pit itself against? One way to go about this dizzying web of self-engagement would be to dissolve all absolute predicates, being open to a differentiation of relations. Sometimes relations may appear between philosophy and science, sometimes between religion and philosophy, sometimes between science and religion, or between various other phenomena the predication of which depends on the actual constellation. Having said that, any such view can only establish itself on the grounds of some initial predication, however provisional or open-ended it may be.<sup>60</sup> Thus, via a long detour, it seems that I basically agree with William Alston that we already know – or will have to know – what religion is (1967, 142) and that we may wish to investigate the pragmatic boundaries, rather than the essential core, of this notion. Be that as it may, I cannot help but associate the concept of religion with notions of gods, afterlife, sacred norms, and various rituals, and I cannot help thinking that even though sports and politics may sometime share characteristics with these phenomena they are not, strictly speaking, religious. As for my philosophical interest in the latter, it stems, to a great extent at least, from a cultural process of alienation according to which various phenomena are drawn together (in ordinary language) under the predicate of ‘religion’. It is not that I personally designate them thus, but that I am more in tune, as it were, with this predicate, however imprecise it might be, than with the *actual* phenomena for which it is used. It is not that I don’t experience

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Cassirer, 1993, 186 f.; 196.

their presence. They surround me, and I know people intimately who live by them. This is how close these phenomena come. Even so, they appear strange to me. Why is that? If it were only for my personal inclinations, it would not merit any further reflection in the present type of investigation. Yet, I sincerely believe that although a personal point of view is indispensable for an honest philosophical approach, one's way of seeing things does not merely belong to oneself and oneself only.

The social reality of our individual being speaks through each of our thoughts, however much we may like to think that they differ from mainstream opinions or, more concretely, from the mind-set of individuals we openly disagree with. The point is not, of course, that we think the same things, not even that we share the exact same concepts, but rather that the conditions of possibility for conceptual clarification, for disagreeing or coming to agreement or sharing values or having different convictions, and so on, are the very roots of our social identities. I thus hold that the generally unproblematic reference to something called religion is indicative of these background conditions. One may object to the tacit premise of homogeneity implied by this suggestion, and I guess it would be a fair objection from a sociological point of view. Yet, my reason for presuming an idealized state of things is that it is only possible to engage in a philosophical argument with someone, or about something, where the possibility of mutual understanding actually exists (cf. Habermas, 2005, 46). Otherwise we wouldn't even know whether we were at odds or not.<sup>61</sup> However, I would hesitate to go as far as to speak of 'background assumptions' in Rawls' sense (2002, 132–156), since what I have in mind are socio-historical premises, a sort of cultural currency, as it were, which make basic assumptions possible to begin with,<sup>62</sup> maybe a bit like Schilbrack's concept of metaphysics (2014, 156 f), and yet more amenable to the open medium of communicative interaction by the very means of language. I therefore find myself in line with the concept of 'Lifeworld' in the sociological sense with which Habermas uses it (1981, I, 107, referring to Schütz rather than Husserl),<sup>63</sup> and my point is that what we generally associate with religion in a modern, globalized society, irrespective of our individual beliefs, has a focal point beyond the mere assemblage of phenomena that are *just* cultural, societal, political, traditional, and valuable. I don't imply that we should look for this kind of principality beyond the world, but simply beyond the general displacement of reality-determination that goes by various names, each pinpointing the principle of a supposed breach, such as Dis-

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61 Thus I think we will have to agree with Putnam in his refutation of the so-called 'incommensurability thesis', 1981, 114 f.

62 I am therefore reluctant to buy into Rawls's allied concept of 'overlapping consensus' (op.cit.), inasmuch as I take this consensus to ensue from the intellectual comparison of 'comprehensive doctrines'.

63 Habermas states that "as historical and social beings we always already find ourselves in a linguistically structured lifeworld" (my translation of "[a]ls geschichtliche und soziale Wesen finden wir uns immer schon in einer sprachlich strukturierten Lebenswelt vor", 2002, 25).

enchantment of the world, Enlightenment, and Secularization. However, we should keep in mind that the very concept of religion has come to attain its modern meaning-potential because of this development. The conceptual crystallization of 'religion' in modernity seems, among other things, to emerge from the recognition, prominent during Romanticism, that in order to understand mankind it was no longer sensible to condemn divergence, i.e., the *many* claims to truth, for the sake of holding fast to the one and only truth of Christendom.

Internal controversies as well as the institutionalized differentiation of society had already, for a long time, led to an uncontrollable differentiation of beliefs. Truth diversified into religious truth (and confessions at odds with each other), scientific truth, poetic truth, truth of personal opinion, economic truth, and so on. The church was no longer (irrespective of its factions) representative of truth in an all-including sense, but merely of religious truth, one truth among others. Modern differentiations of academic theology can also be seen in this light as, for instance, the humanistic traits of Liberal Theology as well as the passionate reaction from Dialectic Theology with its denial of being a religion in the first place. From the latter point of view, Christianity cannot be regarded as a cultural phenomenon amongst other cultural phenomena without the prize of undermining its ultimate concern. Revelation would lose its grip if it became detached from the one and only truth (in God) and shrink to being merely *a* revelation of *a* truth (from *a* god). The kingdom into which the Christians were baptized would merely become one among many. Yet, this is actually the destiny of any baptism, namely, that the baptized becomes identifiable, a fact that makes for difference. Today, religion is that which in the course of time has been baptized with the name of 'religion' rather than with that of God (although the proper name of God is that which may reappear beyond the deconstruction of Christianity, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, 2008, 118 f, cf. chapter 87). Religion is no longer what it was, no longer something that was, *not even a something* when it managed to pervade society and human life with a commitment to an all-encompassing determination – or rather: expression – of reality. Theology and philosophy *are* no longer what they *were* for Aristotle the philosopher-theologian or Augustine the theologian-philosopher. Yet, philosophy should not forget the intimate, twin-like, relationship it once had with theology. Philosophy of religion should be the kind of philosophy which, on the one hand, remembers this affinity with theology, their shared interest in truth, and on the other hand, reflects on the parting of ways.<sup>64</sup> As I see it, and for arguments given above as well as later in this work, a philosophy of religion can only keep its obligation to truth by renouncing it. "The whole is the un-truth" (*Das Ganze ist das*

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<sup>64</sup> In this sense, the relation between religion and a philosophy of religion resembles that between art and religion as described poignantly by Adorno (1992, 294–296), implying that it is not only 'art' (the topic for Adorno), but also religion which "can keep faith to its true affinity with religion, the relationship with truth, only by an almost ascetic abstinence from any religious claim", *ibid.*

*Unwahre*), as Adorno once said (MM 55). In this respect, the gesture of philosophy of religion is the direct opposite as that of Dialectic Theology. Instead of silencing the human voice, philosophy strives to trace its sound in every instance, from history and language to nature and God. This is the interest that philosophy – at least the kind of philosophy I have in mind – has in religion: to see humanity reflected in the belief in God and the belief in God reflected in humanity, as in the recognition between siblings who out-grew the intimate bonds with their parents. For philosophy religion is a source to understand better what we are, not what God is. Yet, without understanding what is meant by God, sin, salvation, the immortality of the soul, etc., in various contexts, we would only understand the outside of a religious attitude, not religion as such. This is where the more traditional philosophy of religion, working inside the discursive framework of a religious tradition, can enrich our understanding. But it cannot stand alone, if philosophy is to be given full range as philosophy. We *also* need to look at ‘the outside’ of belief, or better perhaps, at the way in which the inside is shown on the outside (while such distinctions may remain strictly metaphorical). In other words, we need to reflect on the ways in which faith and belief create, and are created by, social individuals, and take into account how these two factors generate a common ground of what we humans have become.

But is it not the truth of our nature we are seeking then? Are we not trying to reach beyond the strictures of our historical being? And how can we do that while acknowledging, at the same time, that our point of view is historically situated? It goes without saying that the very notion of a historically situated reason is logically problematic. Either it claims to be true, which means that it undermines itself, or it disavows truth which leaves it with an uncomfortably oblique status. Yet ‘oblique’ is not the same as ‘without meaning’. To think of reason as historically situated is not the same as claiming that it is *only* historically situated, that it cannot transcend the boundaries of our current point of view. It only implies that we cannot engage ourselves in concrete ways of thinking and interpretation which, *at the same time*, transcend their own limits, their own cultural embedment.<sup>65</sup> We may not determine the essence of religion, since it may not be something that is isolable from our defining interest. This does not entail that nothing is essentially religious, but merely that we are relentlessly destined to work in the shadow of our own engagement with the

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<sup>65</sup> Endorsing the view of a situated reason (*Situierung der Vernunft*), Habermas sees its primary significance in the ‘de-transcendentalization of the epistemic subject’ (*Detranszendentalisierung des erkennenden Subjekts*), meaning that it finds itself in-the-world in a concrete historical situation. It does not mean, however, that it thereby loses its world-enclosing spontaneity. It remains a matter of dispute whether the concept of reason should be seen as lost in the sands of history and contextuality, or whether it has kept a power to transcend the contextuality from within, as Habermas avers by using the concept of ‘a transcendence from within’ (*Transzendenz von innen*), 2005, 28. Thus, he admits that our understanding of ourselves is *conditioned* by the historical (and social) context, but not that it is *bound* by it.

world. Once we surmount the gap between the world and our conception of it, the world we reach is no longer the world we left, and so the interstice remains. This should not be taken as a confession to dualism, though. On the contrary, I want to avoid the pitfalls of dualism as much as any other, but I don't want to praise monism in name only. In general it seems much harder to escape our inclination to think of a divide between 'experience' and 'world' than is often supposed.<sup>66</sup>

Drawing towards a conclusion of this chapter, I am adamant that we don't look for religion as a set of internal properties, whether these pertain to beliefs and practices or to various uses of the word 'religion', but that we locate religion in our relation with it, that is, in relation to a way of thinking that has become gradually less familiar to us, internally challenged by its own development. Wittgenstein's concepts of 'family resemblances' and 'language games' are ill-used as roundabout ways to *defining* things, and to speak of 'uses' instead of 'things' does not make much of a difference in this regard. Still, the point would be that if religion is what it is, owing at least in part to our relation with it, we find it in the midst of our ability to speak about it without defining it. Thus, the point is not to define it on the ground of our conceptual use, but to *refrain* from defining it, on ground of this use. Thus, the best way to frame a discourse around religion without confining it (the thing religion) to a scientific objectification is to leave it for interactive interpretation, blurred around the edges, but significant enough to be recognized. In order to buy into familiar associations as well as to open up for an appreciation of subterranean affinities with other phenomena, I thus set out to speak of religion as *something that takes place in the name of a 'world' beyond this world*.<sup>67</sup> It is worth noticing, on the one hand, that this minimal 'definition' is in fact nothing but a conceptualization of an immediate background association,<sup>68</sup> and, on the other hand, that if taken literally, it actually allows

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<sup>66</sup> Cf., for instance, my criticism on Searle on this point, Albinus, 2013b, 12 ff.

<sup>67</sup> I am aware that this is exactly what Schilbrack warns vehemently against as having had "a pernicious effect on the study of religions", the argument being that not all religions harbours "a cosmic dualism", 2014, 133. It goes without saying that this argument only works on the premise of a definition that excludes 'cosmic dualism'. I dare to say that what Schilbrack wants to repudiate is rather the premises of dualism as such (that is, as a philosophical view) than the perspective of 'religious' communities in which the world of sensations is conceived on the symbolic premises of something beyond our sensations and thus principally independent of empirical conditions, op.cit. 134. It is this something that I prefer to call a 'world' in order not to trivialize it and, more importantly, to keep it distinct from non-observables in science. I must confess that I find Schilbrack's claim that 'religious discourse' is engaged with the "commitment to live a certain way or to understand certain values as ultimate or to see oneself under a certain frame of reference" (op.cit. 153) as anything but an objection to speaking about religion as regarding this world in light of another. I do not disagree, on the other hand, with the view that however we want to define religion, it must be something that is profoundly and unavoidably occupied with the conditions of this world, cf. also Nancy, 2008, 10.

<sup>68</sup> I venture to hold that if anyone were asked the question 'what would you call phenomena that take place in the name of a world beyond this world', no one would hesitate to say 'religion'. However,

phenomena to emerge as religious in unexpected places as, for instance, in language which also imposes a 'world' upon this world (by making it a habitable and communicable place).<sup>69</sup> "An entire mythology is stored within our language", as Wittgenstein once put it (PO, 133). We are constantly lured by predicative language to abstract from immediacy and speak of 'things' *beyond* our grasp, exactly because they have nothing to do with things in the normal sense (as in the concepts of 'Death', 'Justice', 'God', 'Hope', etc.). Yet, much pertains to what we mean by 'beyond', not only on the semantic level, but on the pragmatic level as well. Grammatically speaking, 'beyond' is a relative preposition, tending to assume a substantive meaning ('The Beyond'), but remaining adjunct to the 'this-ness' of presence and immediacy, either by contrast or by transformation (as in mysticism). Every time our communication involves absence, inaccessibility, or unavailability, in a semantic as well as in a pragmatic sense, the meaning potentials of 'beyond' encroaches on it. The extension of the universe, for instance, is beyond our comprehension, but not, for that reason, part of The Beyond, and not *beyond* in the same sense as the extension (or infinity?) of love or numbers transgress our means of expression. Nonetheless, in all cases something is beyond something else and yet adjunct to it. In other words, it should not surprise us when, in some instances, religion can be science and science religion, religion politics and politics religion. What we focus on will be a matter of interrelations, aspects and perspectives, rather than internal properties of fixed concepts. My contribution to philosophy of religion will be a philosophy of that part of our human engagement with the world that points to something beyond (it). Not that this engagement strictly defines – i.e., sets the boundaries for – religion as such. Whether or not there is 'such' a boundary is, I venture to think, beyond our grasp – meaning that what is 'beyond' is always already besides, i.e., by our side, and immanent. Thus, the human engagement with the 'beyond' may not define religion as such but rather forms a cultural habitation around a 'split reference', as Paul Ricoeur would call it, a way of referring which is not referring and yet a practice that allows us to *make something* of religion as a phenomenon.

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this does not imply that we have a definition. A definition sets the *outer* boundaries. There is a world of difference between necessary and sufficient conditions.

<sup>69</sup> A similar point can be found in Heidegger (1954b, 187; 1971, 32; 1978, 315, especially 2004, 318 f) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2008, 5) with reference to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.



### 3 Philosophy of Religion as a Social Phenomenon

Philosophy of religion is a social phenomenon just as religion is a social phenomenon and thus the two are found on the same plane of existence. This is trivial, of course, and it doesn't prevent us from investigating religion (nor philosophy for that matter), just as we are used to investigate the transactions of value in Economy and institutions of law and power in Political Science. The fact that we are part of the reality we behold doesn't preclude us from *perceiving* things and sometimes seeing things that internally committed participants don't see themselves. What the basic condition of our position calls for, more than anything else, is a balanced interaction between understanding and explanation.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the Study of Religion differs from other fields of investigation such as Economy, Political Science, Studies of Literature and Art, primarily because of the ontology invested in it. We can engage in social, and various interpretative, sciences without being involved in questions about ontology, that is, the range and nature of existing entities. Yet, religion is about how we humans *basically* conceive of the world, and therefore incommensurable ideas of existence are at stake in what is generally regarded as an unbridgeable gap between religion and science.<sup>71</sup>

To speak of religion as an aesthetic or a psychological phenomenon, or even as an anthropological phenomenon, misses the real engagement underlying all interactions with religion, namely the question of truth, not *about* religion, but *of* religion. In other words, what is at stake, are questions about ultimate existence and the determination of *our* existence as human beings (regarded as questions from our point of view, that is). If we dispense with this point of interest we are rather doing anthropology or psychology than a genuine study of religion, the difference being that in anthropology and psychology we are concerned with the way of being human, whereas in the study of religion we are concerned with the way in which humans point to something beyond their own being. If this 'beyond' is being trivialized by explanatory reductions in which religious attitudes are regarded as nothing but dispositions or inclinations, unconscious drives, power relations, or whatever, I dare say that even if all of these 'mechanisms' might be at work in religion, we would still have failed to discriminate the phenomenon of *religion* among other kinds of human attitudes. The same holds even if the 'beyond' is merely, and more cautiously, reduced

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<sup>70</sup> The balance I am thinking of is different from the alleged 'interactive view' proclaimed by Lawson and McCauley (1990, 22–31), where interpretation is merely considered a way of presupposing and organizing empirical knowledge in order for explanations to set in. As I see it, interpretation is not merely instrumental, but also, and primarily, a way of letting oneself be addressed.

<sup>71</sup> As for exceptions according to positions mostly taken in an Anglo-Saxon tradition, see Barbour, 2000, who also presents arguments for viewing science and religion as complementary perspectives, see also, N.H. Gregersen & J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, 1998. The complementary view, however, may still acknowledge a gap that cannot be abridged.



to an existential *style* of thinking, analogous to a masterpiece in art which is evaluated according to an immanent level of aesthetic criteria. We would still lose sight of the actual phenomena of religion, whereas, in the stylistic interpretation of a work of art, we would keep the very nature of the product in view, however reductive the exposition might be. The self-reflecting world of art gains its relative autonomy from a renunciation of *transcendence*. In the case of religion, however, 'transcendence' is the heart of the matter. If religion is regarded in its representative *function*, rather than on account of its transcending *aspiration*, its symbols are in principle exchangeable with other sorts of representation; in other words, our conceptual tools may fail to grasp the specificity of the phenomena at hand. Having said that, we must also realize that not only can modern philosophy and science not share the transcending gesture of religion, but they rather contradict it in the outset. As far as I can see nothing is as fundamentally contradicted beforehand in the other interpretative and social sciences.

Religion makes a special kind of problem for the interpretative sciences. Yet, it may go without saying that an interpretative interaction with religion is presented with other options than outright denial. A secularized philosophy of religion may choose to approach, and implicitly defend, religion as a purely aesthetically or existentially significant phenomenon. But does it not, in this case, transform it into something that it wasn't before? Does it not miss the voice of God, so to speak? To my mind, this imminent consequence advocates for having a theological philosophy of religion that reflects on the criteria of meaning internal to tradition, but it leaves an empty space for a theologically uncommitted philosophical engagement with religion and the implied aspect of truth-commitment. Thus, instead of allowing the *question of truth* to dictate the agenda, whether through consent or refusal, we are in need of a philosophy of religion that turns its attention from a justification of truth towards the *game of truth*, that is, towards the ways in which the concept of truth is *used*. I admit that there is no privileged positioning (no God's point of view, as it were) for this undertaking; it has to be done in the midst of language use, and so the immediately expected commitments to truth are at work while the investigation is actually taking place. Does this mean that the philosophical investigation of truth-games implies a pernicious *salto mortale*, an attempt to overcome its own implications? Or does it merely point to a circularity which, instead of being *vicious*, calls for a reflective way of how to enter the circle? With Heidegger I shall opt for the latter (SZ, § 32, p. 153), and with Wittgenstein and Foucault in mind, I shall take my chances and deal with 'truth' as a term among any other in the game of language.

### 3.1 Wolterstorff's Concept of Divine Discourse

We are not ready to deal adequately with 'truth' in a pragmatic sense, however, before we look into the social institutions that actually make these games possible. All too

often, I think, the philosophical study of religion has tended to ignore the pragmatic implications of religious dogmas, highlighting instead the implication of abstract arguments.<sup>72</sup> Actually, Nicholas Wolterstorff has tried to make up for this deficiency by focusing on the pragmatic conditions of a 'divine discourse' from the point of view of John Searle's speech act theory (1995, 80–82; 193 ff). However, the merits of this approach are endangered by his position within Reformed Epistemology, according to which we are entitled to believe that God actually speaks (op.cit. 261 ff). Still, I should like to claim that some basic points in Wolterstorff's exposition of religious speech acts are pragmatically enlightening and can be appreciated without the final dependency on transcendent authorization. At least I judge this to be the case, for instance, in his speaking about the structure of a 'double agency discourse' (op.cit. 38 ff) and the need for 'deputized' as well as 'appropriated discourse' (op.cit. 42 ff; 51 ff). As examples of the first, he refers 1) to a president who signs a document conceived by a secretary among the trusted staff, and 2) to executives who authorize secretaries to sign letters for them. In both cases declarations are made on behalf on the authorizing person. Yet, more than one agent is involved in producing the exact statements, and we can therefore speak of a double agency discourse. In the case of a deputized discourse, the person ultimately in charge has appointed a deputy with the right to speak in her name. This same structure – in terms of a proclaimed line of authorization – is found in prophetic and apostolic discourse, where the human authors are declared to speak on behalf of God (o.cit. 45 ff).<sup>73</sup> When it comes to the authority of tradition as a whole, however, it requires more than the voice of human representatives. Or to put it differently, human representatives can only be regarded as such inasmuch as they represent a higher authority referred to as having appropriated the total discourse. As Wolterstorff puts it:

If it is the Christian Bible we are speaking of, the event which counts as God's appropriating this totality as the medium of God's own discourse is presumably that rather drawn out event consisting of the Church's settling on this totality as its canon (op.cit. 54).

Instead of regarding every word of the Bible as directly spoken or inspired by God, as would presumably only pertain to a minority of believers, Wolterstorff acknowledges the component of institutional conditioning in the long-term formation of a 'divine discourse'. Yet, inasmuch as this formation is intrinsically believed to reflect the will of God, it follows that the scriptural frame of meaning entrenched in it, can be taken, in a general sense, to be legitimized – or appropriated – by God himself. From the point of view of a formalizing discourse analysis, however, this authority

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<sup>72</sup> As prominent examples of this trend, see Plantinga & Wolterstorff, 1983; Davies, 1998; and Wainwright, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Deuteronomy 18 is a *locus classicus* in the *Bible* for the question about the legitimacy of prophet, cf. Wolterstorff, op.cit. 47.

of 'God' would simply be a special version of the general author-function understood as a "principle of rarefaction", that is, the "unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements" (Michel Foucault, 1971, 14). Insofar as I find it reasonable, in all pragmatic instances, to keep an eye on the socio-linguistic level of discursive strategies (rather than specifically embracing the apologetic agenda of Wolterstorff), I think Foucault has provided us with the more important perspective here. Yet, once again we hit upon the hermeneutically significant obstacle of truth-commitment inscribed in the semantic core of religious discourse. This quandary does not change the fact, however, that regarded as a game of truth, the divine appropriation of this discourse, which is another word for making it a canon, shows a strategy of safeguarding communal references of meaning and, in a more comprehensive sense, a strategy of authorizing the very institution of religion with all its pragmatic implications of deputizing, judging, banning, prescribing, and acting in general.<sup>74</sup> Foucault would probably count it among those 'fellowships of discourse' which sustain "their ambiguous interplay of secrecy and disclosure", and whose function is "to preserve or to reproduce discourse, but in order that it should circulate within a closed community" (op.cit. 18). Irrespective of the fact that the missionary dimension of the Christian discourse soon made it open to the world, it held fast to an internal principle of unchangeable repetition. Hence, what from Wolterstorff's point of view counts a 'God's appropriation' turns in Foucault's gaze into a "secret-appropriation and non-interchangeability" on the level of anonymous discourse formation (ibid.).

### 3.2 Searle's Concept of Institutional Facts

The institutionalized reality of religion has to be taken into account before we can estimate the full implications of relevant truth commitments. And it seems immediately promising in this respect to follow up upon Wolterstorff's attempt to draw on Searle. Yet, the pragmatic significance of Searle's philosophy reaches far beyond the analysis of language according to his theory of speech acts (1969), although he basically seems to regard the conceptual inclusion of the mind and the social world as building upon the same principles (2010, 11). To the amazement of Habermas and Apel, however,

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<sup>74</sup> As I have tried to show in another context (1997, 218–228), the discursive aspect of institutional religion may be determined as a strategy of legitimation instantiated by a (virtual) communicative interaction between 1) a transcendent voice (either as an implied locutionary act or as a source of locution, e.g. scripture), 2) a human representative (as, for instance, a vicar), and 3) an ordinary participant (as, for instance, by belonging to a congregation). Even in Buddhism, which seems to present us with an exception to this rule (presuming that we would want to count Buddhism among institutional religions), it might be said that the sayings (and legendary 'doings') ascribed to Gotama Buddha play an authoritative and legitimizing role in actual practice even if they ostensibly renounce the reverence of any authority.

'speech acts' only survive Searle's turn of interests by becoming filtered through a philosophy of mind (Habermas, 1993; Apel, 1993; Searle, 1993). Thus, in his latest book, he holds on to the claim that "[o]nce you see how the nature of meaning creates the possibility of speech acts, you can see that the limits set by a language are already limits set by the mind" (2010, 16).<sup>75</sup> This clear stance within a philosophy of mind (or consciousness) has to be notified at the outset in order to appreciate the implications in Searle's search for "a deeper understanding of social phenomena" (op.cit. 5). From a point of view closer to pragmatism (in the span between the later Wittgenstein and the later Foucault), one might be skeptical towards the prerogative of 'the mind' in Searle's determination of meaning and rather look for meaning on the already social level of language use. However, I want to grant Searle the same principle of charity that pitched my appreciation of Wolterstorff's notion of discourse.

What seems most fruitful in Searle's approach is to analyze certain kinds of social phenomena as 'institutional facts' (1995, 31).<sup>76</sup> In his widely praised work *The Construction of Social Reality* he reapplies his concept of constitutive rules, once conceived in relation to speech acts, as a formula for defining social, and institutional, facts. It plainly sounds: 'x counts as y in c' (op.cit. 43). The prime example is 'money' which is an institutional fact in the sense that paper notes (x), for instance, stands for some value (y) according to the context (c) of a valid, national currency. Another example is that a certain person (x) takes up the presidency (y) for some period of time in a nation state (c) (2010, 10). The instigation of institutional facts rests on the kind of speech acts Searle terms 'declarations' (op.cit. 11). They are the 'status functions' by which human beings, alone among all living kinds, count on the stability of properties that cannot be found in the physical structure of things. And it is the ability of "collective *acceptance or recognition*" that constitutes the condition of possibility for making this stability – i.e., the 'counting-as' – work (op.cit. 8).<sup>77</sup> Although there are no physical properties that distinguish the casualties of war from first-degree murders,

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<sup>75</sup> By taking this point of view, Searle turns Wittgenstein's Tractarian claim that '*the limits of my language mean the limits of my world*' (TLP 5.6) upon its head and, in effect, denies the linguistic restriction of world-accessibility. It should come as no surprise to the reader that I rather take Wittgenstein's point of view, even if his Tractarian determination of language still carries traits of logical objectification, characteristic of a philosophy of consciousness.

<sup>76</sup> Clifford Geertz follows a more Durkheimian line of thought than Searle by regarding the seat of symbols to be 'extrinsic' insofar as they "lie outside the boundaries of the individual organism", op.cit. 92. It is Searle, however, who attracts a primary interest in the present work because of the strictly philosophical conceptuality with which he works out his view of mind and language.

<sup>77</sup> Searle refers to Jennifer Hudin's objection that the stability of institutional arrangement may require 'approval' rather than 'acceptance' (op.cit. 8), the philosophical implications of which are elaborately worked out by Axel Honneth, 1985. However, Searle stands committed to working out the structure of speech acts as being a precondition for analyzing normative attitudes, 1993, 92 f.

the collectively recognized status of each, according to their proper context, makes all the difference (and this is exactly what Searle's formula aims to show).

Whereas linguistically instigated declarations are the skeleton, so to speak, of social reality, Searle realizes that the deontological power invested in institutional facts need not be initially expressed by linguistic declarations (op.cit. 94 ff). As an example he imagines a tribe that builds a wall around their huts for protection. Then, even if the wall decays over time, a remaining line of stones may still count as a boundary which is not to be crossed by outsiders unless they are so permitted by way of exception (ibid.). Yet, the "collectively recognized status assigned to the line of stones" must reflect "the concept of an obligation" (op.cit. 95); otherwise, we wouldn't be able to make "a distinction between simple dispositions to behavior, which do not require language, from cases where there is an institutional deontology" (ibid.). This is an interesting remark, and I shall return to it below. But first we must consider another of Searle's points, namely, his distinction between nonlinguistic and linguistic institutional facts. The first are those institutional facts which are instances of a recognized status in the social world, and the second are those which work on a purely linguistic level. Whereas the status of, say, a president is constituted by a linguistic declaration, his recognized function reaches beyond "the powers of semantics", as Searle phrases it (op.cit. 93). As an example of the linguistic institutional fact, he somewhat surprisingly mentions the simple facts of stating something or asking a question (ibid.). Of course, statements or questions are linguistic phenomena (although they also count as *acts*), but what is it that makes them specifically institutional? Perhaps Searle's wants us to understand 'institutional' in the basic sense of a 'constitutive rule'. Yet, whereas such a definition may have intriguing implications, I cannot but understand Searle's project as aiming for higher and more complex orders of social constitution than that of speech acts (although, of course, there might be a continuity of structure). The question would then be: What is a linguistic institutional fact at this higher level? Be that as it may, his distinction may be utilized with interesting results in the case of religion, and that is, of course, what I am after here. If we take a church, for instance, we have a social institution that constitutes a center for a multitude of related institutional facts. According to Searle's formula we can, first of all, regard a vicar as someone (x) who is recognized as a legitimate representative (y) of God within the context (c) of the church and the congregation. The appointed servant of God, the vicar, is thus invested with the powers to undertake the liturgical acts of baptizing, blessing, reading the last rites, and so forth. However, what are these acts other than purely linguistic phenomena recognized on an institutional level that allows them to define reality? Do they not belong to the "fascinating class of speech acts that combine the word-to-world  $\downarrow$  and the world-to-word  $\uparrow$  direction of fit" by having "both directions of fit simultaneously in a single speech act  $\updownarrow$ " (op.cit. 12)?

The only difference in civic status for the infant, before and after the ceremonial act of baptism, is situated in the institutional confirmation of the name. However, according to the *intrinsic* frame of interpretation, this means that the child is initiated

to the kingdom of God.<sup>78</sup> That is to say, the acquired status, as seen from the perspective of religious commitment (i.e., the parent's confessional response on behalf of the child), makes *a world of difference*. But it is still projected entirely onto the plane of linguistic institutional facts. This is the case, at least, from the perspective of the making of a social world or "the fundamental ontology of the entities studied by the social sciences" (op.cit. 200 f). There is an obvious difference, however, between being a member of the parliament and being a member of God's kingdom by way of being a member of the Christian congregation. The range of power, bestowed on the first, obviously transgresses the semantics of her authority, whereas the same cannot unequivocally be said of the latter.<sup>79</sup>

In the religious case, we seem to be dealing with an institutional counterpart to Wolterstorff's 'double agency discourse'. This form of discursive declaration is at work, even in a twofold way, when the parents 'stand in' for the child and agree to the words of baptism uttered by the priest. The vicar speaks in the name of God, and the parents speak in the name of the child. We can even define the discourse as being of the 'appropriated' kind insofar as the child is implicitly expected to acknowledge the parent's voice, and God is expected to appropriate the liturgy (if God is not otherwise believed to speak through the mouth of the vicar). This is easily brought on Searle's formula for constitutive rules insofar as the speech acts of the vicar and the parents (x) count as a confirmation (y) of the child's christening and adoption in the Christian community (c). Moreover, the 'appropriation'-part of Wolterstorff's perspective seems to be in line with what Searle terms "a standing Declaration" (2010, 98), namely the normative and institutional framework within which 'physical events' such as the sound of 'yes I do' count as a confession much in the same way as the impact of a ball counts as "a base hit" and a lethal blow to someone's head (even if by this same act) may count as "a first-degree murder" (op.cit.). A difference between nonlinguistic and linguistic institutional facts admittedly allows us to speak about physical events as base hits and first-degree murders, on the one hand, and mere speech acts as realizing the absolution of sin, for instance, on the other. On the one hand, the vicar is just as entitled to give absolution as the president is entitled to declare war. On the other hand, the first act makes only for a linguistic institutional fact, whereas the latter makes for going to battle. However, from the point of view of the religious discourse, absolution and salvation may be regarded as transcending the linguistic level just

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<sup>78</sup> Thus, the Swedish philosopher of language, Anders Jeffner distinguishes between the agreement of everyone on the correctly used performative of baptism, irrespective of their "outlook on the world", and the probable disagreement between an atheist and religious person, among whom the latter "will generally add that the performative is misused if God does not in some way take account of what is done by uttering the performative", 1972, 91. It is, of course, this perspective of the doctrinally committed person, Wolterstorff takes account of in his concept of 'appropriated discourse', cf. above.

<sup>79</sup> It goes without saying that representatives of the church may call upon the authority of the Bible for taking political action, but this would exactly be a case of disputable legitimacy.

as much as the declaration of war transcends it for the president and the nation, he represents (see below, p. 90, 179). Moreover, the blessing of a child, though entirely linguistic, involves many of the same implications as the ordination of a priest. In fact, the one only makes sense in light of the other. Thus, even if the ordination of a priest seems to parallel the appointing of a president inasmuch as both are instances of 'making the social world', the distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic 'powers' or properties will have to be qualified further.

If collective recognition is an indispensable part of social reality, as Searle rightly claims, then the recognition of status functions (as well as other symbolic states of being) *within* a congregation is inseparable from what we regard the institutional facts of this community to be. Analytically we may choose to regard the role of the priest according to two different sets of assessment as once suggested by Anders Jeffner (1972, 20 ff; 90 ff). Seen from the point of view of a secular state, a minister of the church is endowed with a restricted authority to confer, within a given register, a status, which could in principle be conferred by profane agencies as well (as, for instance, matrimony). Seen from the point of view of the religious community, however, only the minister (vicar) can act on behalf of God. In a society where civic order and pragmatism prevail, this congregational recognition is unlikely to come into conflict with the constitutional essentials of a secular democracy. The status of belonging to the kingdom of God does not alter one's secular commitment to civic law (with respect to rights as well as obligations). In this sense, the power of the vicar is merely symbolical. In other words, religious institutional facts seem to fit the bill of Searle's distinction between 'linguistic institutional facts' as *merely* conventional and 'nonlinguistic facts' as transcending the power of semantics. On closer inspection, however, it is not entirely clear how this distinction can be upheld.

It goes without saying that a police officer is authorized to make an arrest (by way of an acknowledged institutional status). In other words, he is entitled to demonstrate a power that has immediate physical consequences. In comparison we may agree that when a vicar sprinkles water on the head of a child and utters the words of baptism, he demonstrates a power which only has a symbolic effect. There are no immediate physical consequences, apart, perhaps, from some whimpering of the child. Being incorporated in a congregation, however, the child may upon growing up internalize a strict rule-following which is more or less effectively doing the job of controlling the physical unfolding of this initiate's life, not to speak of the mental impact of a religious upbringing. Even if we leave out the aspects of mental influence, it seems that we will have to take a continuum between short- and long-term effects into account, which means that eventually we may have to abandon a sharp demarcation between linguistic and nonlinguistic power. Both forms of command are actuated in a social matrix the complexity of which blurs the boundary between semantic and physical realities. The prohibition against receiving a blood donation, for instance, may cause a member of Jehova's Witnesses to refuse life-saving treatment. In fact, we are daily witnesses to the fact that religious convictions, which on the level of social



reality must be regarded as purely linguistic institutional facts, have consequences far beyond the level of semantics. In other words, semantics and pragmatics, convictions and actions, are interrelated at all levels. Searle knows this, of course, and admits to the 'awkwardness in terminology' (op.cit. 93). Yet, he still insists on making a distinction between the constitutive rule of *saying* something and the constitutive rule of *doing* something (ibid.). And quite rightly, *making* a promise is not the same as *keeping* it, although both are acts. The former is linguistic, the latter is nonlinguistic.

As mentioned above, religious speech acts belong to a class that combine the word-to-world  $\downarrow$  and the world-to-word  $\uparrow$  direction of fit in a single speech act, satisfying both directions ( $\Updownarrow$ ) at once (cf. op.cit. 12). The promise of absolution, for instance, redeems the sinner through the very speech act of the priest, which means that the distinction between nonlinguistic and linguistic institutional facts becomes *especially* problematic *within* the symbolic world of religion. Or to put it more poignantly, it reveals the difference between the institutional facts of religion, on the one hand, and of other societal institutions, on the other, rather than explaining religion as part of the general structure of human civilization. It goes without saying that other institutions as, for instance, a sports club or a political party, may involve linguistic facts that are just as consequential as religious ones. Likewise, praise and condemnation, for instance, are not exclusively *religious* speech acts (unless the ultimate meaning-rendering reference is a transcendent one) but general reality-makers in the social world (the psychological level being just as real as the physical). What makes religion special, however, is that it involves a truth beyond other truths, and acts beyond others acts. In a religious context, praise is likely to be more than *just* an approval of some isolable deed; it may also, or rather, work as a way of recognizing the person's 'holy' righteousness, just as disapproval may intimate the risk of condemnation. The double agency discourse is reflected in, as well as supported by, a double meaning system. The world is seen in the light of another world (cf. Doležel, 1998, 128 ff). Acts are not just acts in the world of practicalities, but acts which also get their meaning according to a symbolic system, a system of which rituals are the direct and customary manifestation (cf. C. Geertz, 1993, 112 f). *In order to understand the social nature of religion, we will therefore have to take the nature of its linguistic and symbolic expressions into account rather than sticking entirely to a distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic facts.* As I read Kevin Schilbrack, he might have a similar point in mind when he speaks of religion as being in a direct contact with the world (2014, 165). Searle's distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic facts, on the other hand, builds on concepts of reference and truth which, contrary to his professed stance, inherits an old dualism between mind and matter transposed to a split between the linguistic and the nonlinguistic.

There are philosophical issues at stake in Searle's general view that have to be clarified in order to fully estimate the undeniable merits of his approach to 'institutional facts'. In *Making the Social World*, through which Searle follows up on the general project of *The Construction of Social Reality*, one of his leading questions is:



How is it possible in a universe consisting entirely of physical particles in fields of force that there can be such things as consciousness, intentionality, free will, language, society, ethics, aesthetics, and political obligations? (2014, 3)

In fact, he regards it as “the single overriding question in contemporary philosophy” (ibid.). First of all, he discounts those attempts to answer the question that speak of “two or three worlds in advance”, that is, by subscribing to dualism, or, what is even worse, a three world view as has been espoused by scholars like John Eccles, Roger Penrose, Karl Popper and Jürgen Habermas (cf. Searle, 2007, 21 f).<sup>80</sup> Instead he opts for a one-worldview within a framework of biological naturalism, which he dissociates, at the same time, from the “metaphysical ontologizing” of monism (op.cit. 4). It is not entirely clear, however, what this means apart from his inclination to speak of human consciousness as having “a first-person, or subjective, ontology” as against the epiphenomenalism of cognitive materialism (2007, 20; 50). However, in the later work, he is more concerned with emphasizing that “our mental life depends on the basic facts” rendered by “physics and chemistry, by evolutionary biology and the other natural sciences” (2010, 4). This implies that his account “must be consistent with the basic facts and show how the nonbasic facts are dependent on and derived from the basic facts” (ibid.).

Whereas I fully endorse the notion that we must “respect the basic facts of the structure of the universe” (ibid.), I probably differ markedly from Searle by regarding ‘basic’ in this proposition as being basic only *according to a certain view*. If ‘basic’ is understood in an *unconditional* sense, I fail to see what keeps the underlying worldview from being monistic. In all likelihood, part of Searle’s answer would bear on the concept of institutional facts being social facts and not physical facts. Yet, as being *nonbasic* they must eventually be derivable from basic facts, as Searle imparts, and consequentially we end up with something very much like monism after all. But why then does he want to make a tripartite distinction between 1) physical ontology (as an implied reference for observer-independent facts), 2) social ontology (as the implied reference for ‘observer-dependent facts’), and 3) subjective ontology (as the intentional state)? As a matter of fact, the only thing that seems to prevent Searle from acknowledging the compatibility between his own view and a three-world distinction between a physical, a social, and a subjective level of reality, is his professed naturalism, as I have tried to show elsewhere (2013b, 15–17). This is not an issue that shall take up space here, but it has to be notified that his actual commitment to naturalism reflects problematically on the overall perspective.

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<sup>80</sup> In this respect we will have to distinguish, for instance, between the ontological approach that informs Popper’s Three World notion, and the communicative dimension of validity criteria that lies behind a comparable, but not identical, scheme of thought in Habermas’ theory of communicative action, cf. Albinus, 2013b.

What worries me first of all, in Searle's approach, is his reference to 'subjective ontology' as having an explanatory power concerning the understanding of 'the social world'. When, for instance, he claims that "[p]ains, tickles, and itches are ontologically subjective" (op.cit. 18), it matches his contention that "the limits set by language are already limits set by the mind" (op.cit. 16), and it unmistakably implies that he regards subjective – or first-person – intentionality as a fact we have to take into account. Thus, in *Freedom and Neurobiology* he writes that: "Even if the existence of the constitutive rule is not itself an institutional fact" – and it cannot be inasmuch as it serves to explain it – "at least, it is an observer-relative fact. That already makes it dependent on the consciousness and intentionality of agents, and one wants to know, what exactly is the structure of that consciousness and intentionality?" (2007, 90) In other words, his concept of 'collective intentionality' is, in fact, to be understood as an *assemblage* of coincident individual intentions. Institutional facts and status-functions are conditioned by collective recognition, which means that *collective recognition* cannot be regarded on the same social level of reality, but must be sought in the mind-matter continuum of intentionality. Otherwise, we would fall into the trap of *petitio principii* (which, on account of Searle's empirical agenda, would be damaging). Searle seems to be aware of this inasmuch as he searches for an explanatory level that grounds intentionality in what he regards as a nonreductive biological naturalism. More precisely, he suggests that consciousness is a natural feature, which manifests a 'quantum indeterminism', and quantum indeterminism, he adds, can be boiled down to the level of basic facts inasmuch as they are "indisputably established as a fact of nature" (op.cit. 74). It is hard to grasp the precise merits of this approach, which, on the one hand, seems to resonate of the stochastic model of connectionism in cognitive science, but, on the other hand, tries to explain 'the social world' on premises given by 'subjective ontology'. In any case, it leaves the social nature of 'collective intentionality' underdetermined. Actually, we might want to supply Searle with theories pertaining to the similar sounding concepts of 'joint attention' (Michael Tomasello), 'extended mind' (Andy Clarke & David Chalmers), and 'external memory' (Merlin Donald), and perhaps it might actually be possible to improve on Searle's view through current theories of cultural cognition that avoids the unfortunate ontology of a philosophy of mind. Be that as it may, such an enterprise would sit ill with his professed inclinations.

What is unfortunate, then, about the concept of 'subjective ontology'? If it doesn't pretend to access the mind in any experiential sense, does it not, in fact, acquit itself of the charge directed against the traditional philosophy of consciousness? Actually, I think the charge still stands insofar as Searle takes it for granted that some kind of *intending* must take place prior to its communication in language (1993, 83–85). This was the tempting notion that Wittgenstein grappled with through the whole phase of his later philosophy and it involved a complexity of implications he arguably never entirely got hold of. However, only a few years after his 'return to philosophy' in the late 1920's, he espoused the pragmatic view that the meaning of 'meaning' is

generally to be sought in the use of language.<sup>81</sup> In the latter part of his *Philosophical Investigations*, where he deals extensively with the concepts of meaning and pain, he writes that: “The meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains” (§ 560). Now, if this formulation tempts us to think of this implied *explanation* as grounding ‘meaning’ in an external reference, Wittgenstein’s following sentence forces us to think otherwise, by exactly *explaining* what the former proposition *meant*: “That is, if you want to understand the use of the word ‘meaning’, look for what one calls ‘an explanation’” (ibid.). The explanation of meaning doesn’t transcend the use of language, but is part of it, that is, already a part of what meaning is. The same goes for ‘pain’. Of course, the expression of pain implies a private state (PI § 305–6),<sup>82</sup> but not some ‘thing’ that can be referred to ontologically as one’s *own*. (PI § 253):

How do I use words to signify my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensations? In that case my language is not a ‘private’ one. Someone else might understand it as well as I. (PI § 98)

“Can I point to the sensation?” Wittgenstein goes on to ask. “Not in the ordinary sense,” he replies to himself (§ 258), and continues to unfold his famous refutation of the possibility of having ‘a private language’, that is, a language that none but oneself is able to understand (§ 260–315, initiated already at § 243). To have a language means to act as a social being. If we might tend to think that the word ‘pain’ is derivable from an inner state, we forget that ‘to be in pain’ implies *having a concept of pain* which is located in a game of language. And if we might tend to think that the *use* of language is redundant inasmuch as the propositional content can be dissolved in the actual reference, we forget, among other things, that the grammar for referring to ‘my pain’ differs from the grammar of referring to ‘my foot’ that hurts (cf. § 411). The latter can be indicated ostensibly; the former cannot. And without the rules of grammar applied to the concept of ‘pain’, it becomes entirely meaningless, even though *nothing changes* in respect of ‘basic facts’, as I would say if I were a Searlean. However, the same problem of regarding pain as being ontologically subjective (cf. Searle, 2014, 18) pertains to regarding facts as being unconditionally basic. For Searle basic facts refer to a nonlinguistic state of affairs, whereas nonbasic facts refer to the use of language. For Wittgenstein, on the other hand, “[t]he limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence” (CV, 10e). Once confronted with this proposition – by way of Karl-Otto Apel’s critiquing him for turning towards a philosophy of mind – Searle reacted by saying: “Wittgenstein is mistaken: there are lots of ways

<sup>81</sup> Cf. “For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ ... the meaning of a word is its use in the language.” (PI § 43)

<sup>82</sup> “Pain-behavior can *indicate* a painful place – but the person who is suffering is the person who *manifests* pain”, § 302, my italics.

of describing the facts which correspond to sentences without simply repeating the sentences” (1993, 97). One wonders what ‘ways’ Searle has in mind. Of course, certain sentences can be exchanged with other sentences describing the same state of affairs by using other terms and perhaps other rules of phraseology, but how can a proposition, which explains *what a fact is*, be exchanged with anything but that proposition? I grant that Wittgenstein may still seem to draw on his Tractarian view, here, and in his later philosophy (that is, after his pragmatic turn), he would rather speak of grammar and various ways of using language than about the *basic* form of a proposition. Thus, the transparency of language aimed at in *Tractatus* becomes exchanged with the muddled reality of our form of life. The latter implies that in *some contexts* it will make good sense to distinguish basic facts from nonbasic facts, but since there is no *general* order of use that provides language with strict criteria of meaning – other than the actual use of language as such – the ‘Tractarian rule’ of the above quotation goes for the pragmatic view as well. There is no escaping language, there are only various uses in respect of rules applied to various situations.

Returning to the case of religion, I would claim that we should regard the institutional facts, the constitutive rules, and the collective intentionality, on the same overall level of social reality. Generally speaking, the reference to subjective ontology is a dead end. I admit that it may work in some cases, inasmuch as the way in which we ask questions depends on the kind of knowledge we want to get. But if we want to regard religion *as a social phenomenon*, we should look at the form of life within which we already find ourselves approaching it. No ‘subjective ontology’ can be approached outside of these conditions, and therefore an investigation that chooses to proceed from a subjectively intentional frame of reference faces the risk of turning the blind eye to its own implications.

In Wittgenstein’s second set of remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, he speaks of a “general inclination of the people” in relation to their rituals (PO, 149), and refers to a “common spirit” (p. 151) behind their invention. Contrary to Rush Rhees (1982, 103 ff), I find no persuading argument for regarding this “general inclination of the people” or “the kind of people who take part in [these rites]” (PO, 145) as stemming from the majority of individuals who took part in or grew up with a certain ritual tradition. Rhees’s interpretation follows the same line of argument as Searle in this respect (op. cit. 106; cf. Albinus, forthcoming). However, instead of making a distinction between, on the one hand, ‘the inner nature’ of a ritual tradition, that is, the “the spirit of the ceremony”, and, on the other hand, ‘external actions’ specifically carried out by “any one tribe or nation” (op.cit. 107), I will claim that Wittgenstein is only using varying descriptions of the same phenomenon, namely that of a form of life that engages us, and impresses us, as social beings. Wittgenstein is certainly not suggesting that the form of life of human beings is the sum of individual attitudes that happen to coincide in joint intentionality. Even if we might seek to ground such supposed coincidence by an explanatory reference to semantic truth conditions (as in Davidson, see below) or objective interests of some sorts (as in Steven Lukes, 1974, 53), we would fail to

spot the nature of our social being, the irreducibility of our use of language. What this boils down to in the present argument is that the social phenomenon of religion cannot be translated to human inclinations that are not already social in nature. To state that there is no empirical evidence for religious beliefs (as Bruce Lincoln does, for instance, 2012, xi), or that religious attitudes are derivable from the *basic* semantics of 'meaning' and 'knowledge', or from the cognitive premises of 'mental dispositions' (as in Boyer, 2002) is to circumvent the fact of our social being. Religion is not derivable from anything that is not already social.<sup>83</sup> That religion, or religious belief, may imply mental states of either a private or a biological disposition is something completely different, and statements to that effect rather mimes the way of myth by ignoring the representing implication already at work. It remains true that the status-function, and therefore also the social and nonlinguistic power of a medical doctor differs from that of a priest (and in some cases from a shaman as well), but we can't begin to understand religion before we recognize the ontology, that is, the picture of reality, invested in its social institutions. And the point is that this ontology is as socially conditioned as language and the array of ways in which we happen to use it.

Philosophy of religion is also a social phenomenon. And if scientific truth-claims according to 'basic facts' are habituated in a social setting just as much as religious truth-claims are according to 'nonbasic facts' (apart from obvious differences with regard to empirical testability), so are philosophical claims to truth. In other words, philosophy cannot take any privileged stance over and above religion when it comes to speaking the truth about that social matrix in which we all basically regard ourselves. Philosophy cannot ultimately judge religion to be true or false, but it can and must *think differently* in crucial respects. If it lies within the scope of modern philosophy to acknowledge that social life conforms to no single order, it cannot be either entirely for or against the truth pretensions of religion. Philosophy thus represents an agnosticism which, in the eyes of orthodox believers, may be identical to being against religion.

Let it be reiterated: Philosophy thinks differently than religion, and this is what makes it philosophy in the first place, namely, that it *reflects* on that which presents itself as a given. Philosophy of religion must, of course, differ from religion in the trivial sense that it doesn't take religious truth, or a religious way of life, for granted, but it must also understand its own *affinity* with religion in order to fully apprehend this difference. The affinity lies in the depth of the social, and the respective choices are made *in that depth*. In the end, the confrontation between philosophy and religion is not a theoretical matter (of ultimate truth), but rather a difference in the direction of thought.

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<sup>83</sup> As Wittgenstein muses: "If I wanted to make up a festival, it would die out very quickly or be modified in such a manner that it corresponds to a general inclination of the people", PO, 147 f.

## 4 The Frames of Truth and Reference

*Religions were full of exclamations – hallelujah, evoe, hosanna, om, Jesus, Allah... – exclamations that overflow any sense the words bearing them might have had.*

Jean-Luc Nancy

### 4.1 How Important Is Reference? (Soskice and Wolterstorff)

The question of truth takes many forms, and one of them concerns reference. I shall take up the philosophical attempt to dislocate truth from reference a little later on in this section, but first I shall deal with an issue that has taken up a prominent place in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of philosophy of religion.

In the introduction I spoke about Habermas's concept of myth as a closed world-view, that is, a way of conceiving the world which consists in reproducing otherworldly and totalizing frames of interpretation that leaves no room for independent learning processes. This may be seen, for instance, in Ronald W. Hepburn's theological worries "whether or not the circle of myth, metaphor and symbol is a closed one: and if closed then in what way propositions about God manage to *refer*" (cf. Hesse, 1974, 290, italics mine). What might have been delimited to a discursive determination of myth is thus conceived by Hepburn as a challenge to a theological discourse in general, and is met as such by philosopher of religion Janet Soskice regarding the "cognitive and explanatory use in religious thought of models, analogues, and metaphors" (1985, 118). According to Soskice, Hepburn's main mistake is to hold "that reference must involve unrevisable or exhaustive description" (op.cit. 141). Aligning herself instead with the critical realism of Mary Hesse, Richard Boyd and Hilary Putnam (at some point) as presenting a midway between positivism and idealism, her argument is that science has taught us in practice that by using models we can actually refer to "possible if necessarily unobservable structures of the world" (op.cit. 124). Against the stance of nominalism, she holds that scientific terms can be revised without losing their referential meaning (a point, however, that serves to emphasize the contextual confines of any descriptive vocabulary rather than the empirical conditions of rectification). Armed with this analogy, she drives home her main point, namely that religious metaphors manage to refer just as well as theory-based models.

Corresponding to the scientific communities of interest, there are religious communities of interest (Christians for example) which are bound by shared assumptions, interests, and traditions of interpretation, and share a descriptive vocabulary (op.cit. 150).

She is fully aware that the discursive constraints of valid references are not the same for the religious and the scientific community, but that doesn't change the fact that both can be wrong and both are, in part, dealing with unobservables. The case Soskice

is making is only slightly different from the argument Nicholas Wolterstorff is producing (1995, 273–280), when he finds Virginia (a proclaimed acquaintance of the author himself) entitled to belief that God has spoken to her in her vision, since there is no scientifically informed reason to suggest that she is prone to suffer from delusion. The issue that connects the critical realism of Soskice’s philosophy of religion and the so-called *Reformed Epistemology* of Nicholas Wolterstorff is the commitment to *reference*, indebted to a long-standing tradition of empiricism (in an Anglo-Saxon context) with David Hume and John Locke as the founding fathers. The great divide that followed in the wake of these philosophical spokesmen of the time was that between positivism, on the one hand, and various kinds of realism, on the other, the main difference being that reality was either regarded as that which can be observed directly or that which fundamentally transgresses our senses and is thus knowledgeable only by indirect or insufficient means. It goes without saying that Soskice and Wolterstorff share the latter conviction. But where does this lead us in regard of religion? Should we take our point of departure in religious language (including metaphors and speech acts which are the topics dealt with by Soskice and Wolterstorff) as testifying to an engagement with the world by means of reference? (That it is a *special kind* of reference does not change the fact that is regarded as a *reference*). In order for this to make sense, we would be dealing with religious language as a set of meanings dependent on propositions which are either true or false according to external conditions (cf. *Bedeutung* in Frege’s sense).<sup>84</sup> Obviously, Soskice and Wolterstorff find this conceivable (and they are not alone). Soskice may want to soften the criterion a bit by speaking about the referential confines of a religious tradition, but either does this not make any difference in principle or she would have to embrace the constructivist view (under the name of idealism) she sets herself up against. Moreover, an exacting focus on *reference* would imply that we regard myth – or religious language in a broader sense – as anything but a closed system of meanings. Contrary to what Habermas holds (speaking from a Kantian tradition), a mythical discourse would then, in principle, be as open to learning processes as would a scientific one. In fact, I have found nothing in Soskice and Wolterstorff that suggests that they should think otherwise. Yet, I find it wrong-headed. I grant that the theories, models, and vocabularies employed in science do not have to refer directly to empirical data, and even when they do, they are not facts, but statements. Nonetheless, they are part of learning processes that depend on the objective accessibility of an exterior world. The criteria of validity in science, even in regard of the most provisional working models, differ profoundly from a (mythical/religious) system of meaning in which the trans-empirical reference is not a necessary inconvenience (as, for instance, in Atomic Theory or Theoretical Astrophysics), but rather an underlying (and therefore unchallenged) *principle*. Kevin Schilbrack has recently made a similar point about religion (2014, 134), but seems to

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<sup>84</sup> I shall specifically with issue below, chapter 5.6



ignore the fact that science is also occupied with ‘realities’ which are not ‘available to our senses’ (cf. *ibid.*). Thus, he doesn’t take the critical procedure of dealing with predictable effects of non-observables into account, and the latter seems, in my view, to be one of the most prominent aspects in which science differ from religion.

Contrary to a religious interpretation of the world, the constitutive principle of science is to construct a picture of the world which is, as far as possible, in accordance with empirical criteria of justification. Hence, it may well be our long-standing habituation to an overall scientific worldview that prompts us to put so much weight on the issues of reference and evidence in the first place.<sup>85</sup> This is what Schilbrack rightly sees a long-standing commitment to focus on “a gap between the human subject and the world” (2014, 155). Instead, he argues for regarding the ways in which human beings make sense of the world as instances of ‘unmediated experience’.<sup>86</sup> This hits a promising note, though the perspective is not entirely worked out and may seem almost gratuitous when, at the same time, Schilbrack refers to the false character of religious accounts inasmuch as “they get things wrong” (op.cit. 171). From a scientific point of view he is right, of course, but can science allow itself to dispense with a gap between the *explanans* of the observer and the *explanandum* of the observed? I think not.

Wittgenstein, to whom Schilbrack also refers, has brought out the point, rather forcefully, that the general notions of reference and evidence are deeply imbued with aspects of a scientific discourse (philosophically harking back to Hume and Kant, we might add) and that we are looking in the wrong direction if we try to determine the meaning of the word ‘God’ on account of its reference. But this has to do with understanding, not with making judgments according to empirical truth.<sup>87</sup>

In order to understand the word ‘God’ we will have to apprehend how it is used and what place it takes up in the lives of those who use it (Wittgenstein, LC, 59 f; 63). Another of Wittgenstein’s examples is the belief in a Last Judgment (op.cit. 53). If a person, who holds this belief, is asked by another person, who doesn’t hold it, to

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<sup>85</sup> Take, for instance, Bruce Lincoln’s introductory remarks to his ‘Critical Explorations in the History of Religion’ where he declares to have “encountered little direct evidence” that gods and demons fill the cosmos as ‘the religious’ believe, 2012, xi; cf. my comment on his approach, Albinus, 2013a. Contrary to this familiar focus, Steven Engler and Mark Gardiner opine that religious studies need to pay attention to pragmatic as well as referential uses of language (2010), while holding on to Davidson’s truth-condition for propositional meaning, cf. below (chapter 4.3).

<sup>86</sup> By using this specific concept, Schilbrack borrows especially from Jean Luc-Marion, whom he also mentions in passing (op.cit. 156), but otherwise he refers to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty for a notion of embodied experience, op.cit. 158.

<sup>87</sup> To be fair this may be what Schilbrack has in mind when he balances his judgment about the falsity of religious metaphysics with conceding that even if they are wrong religious accounts are still “in touch with reality”, op.cit. What I find unfortunate, however, is the undetermined implications of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ in this paragraph. Where the criterion of truth pertains to empirical standards, the use of ‘reality’ seems to pertain to an interpretative level of being-in-the-world.



give evidence for it, both persons may end up realizing that they simply speak different languages. It is not as if the matter were to be assessed by saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or ‘maybe’ on the grounds of evidence. If convincing reasons – for example, some kind of forecast – could be given for the Judgment Day as a coming event, it wouldn’t be a religious belief at all (op.cit. 56). Yet, the believer, challenged about his belief in Judgment Day, would probably say that he has got proof. Nonetheless, all he has is “what you might call an unshakable belief”, as Wittgenstein is quoted as saying, and “[i]t will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life” (op.cit. 54). The belief in Judgment Day is not a hypothesis, but a picture of sin and punishment which the believer has before his mind, and the point about this picture’s belonging to a game of belief rather than to a game of referential evidence is that he “risks things on account of it which we would not do on things which are by far better established for him” (ibid.). The same goes for other matters of religious belief such as, for instance, a belief in the historical foundation of Christianity. If the belief in Christ were based merely on the historical evidence of this person to have existed (perhaps as strongly as the evidence for the existence of Napoleon), this

indubitability wouldn’t be enough to make me change my whole life. It doesn’t rest on an historical basis in the sense that the ordinary belief in historical facts could serve as a foundation. Here we have a belief in historic facts different from a belief in ordinary historic facts. Even, they are not treated as historical, empirical, propositions. (op.cit. 57)<sup>88</sup>

The point Wittgenstein is making here is elsewhere reflected by his concepts of grammar and language games. Whereas in his first Cambridge lectures of 1930 he was still inclined to believe that “[t]he sense of proposition is the way in which it is verified”,<sup>89</sup> two years later, he took exception to ‘this rule of thumb’ by admitting that in “some cases the question ‘How is that verified?’ makes no sense”, offering the proposition ‘I’ve got a toothache’ as an example (PO, 59). Another example, we might add, would be that of religious statements about God, Judgment Day, and so on. This difference between propositions, the meaning of which are fulfilled by empirical reference, and propositions, for which referential evidence is misapplied, can be described as a difference in grammar. Later, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, he speaks of various language-games and offers an elaborated list including: giving and obeying orders, forming and testing a hypothesis, requesting, thanking, cursing,

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**88** Among Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*, we find the following remark bearing out a similar point: “Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! [...] Here you have a narrative, don’t take the same attitude towards it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it, CV, 32c.

**89** This view was formed in his early phase and circulated within the Vienna Circle, cf. Waismann, 1979, 76 ff.

greeting, and praying (PI § 23). What he wants to emphasize by using the word of language-game is “the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life” (ibid.), and further that this realization goes against his earlier attempt (in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) to reconstruct the structure of language as a logical order. Instead, he now holds that in most cases, “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (PI § 43).

Although philosophers such as Soskice and Wolterstorff may basically share this pragmatic view of language, it seems that for them it goes to throw light on different criteria pertaining to questions of reference rather than to viewing the very employment of referential and evidential criteria in the light of language *use*, as part of an activity, that is, a form of life. The obvious reason for this is that being philosophers of religion they are interested in religious language as information about the content of religious beliefs, whereas Wittgenstein was interested in language as a form of life. The breed of philosophers who Kai Nielsen disparagingly called the neo-Wittgensteinian ‘fidiests’ (1967, 109 ff), because of their seemingly compartmentalized view of religion, are perhaps to be located somewhere in between. Some of them, such as Rush Rhees (1986) and D.Z. Phillips (1976), often spoke in overall terms about religious language games as if some part of language were reserved for religious beliefs. Actually, a whole branch of philosophy of religion seems to have developed on this premise (cf. Clack, 1999). Whatever the merits on its own account, I would draw another lesson from Wittgenstein, one that concerns various crisscross uses of language rather than a clear-cut demarcation between religious and scientific discourse. Thus, Wittgenstein is cited for having given, somewhat probingly, the following example in his first lecture of religious belief:

We come to an island and we find beliefs there, and certain beliefs we are inclined to call religious. What I’m driving at is, that religious beliefs will not... They have sentences, and there are also religious statements. These statements would not just differ in respect to what they are about. Entirely different connections would make them into religious beliefs, and there can easily be imagined transitions where we wouldn’t know for our life whether to call them religious beliefs or scientific beliefs. (LC 58)

I take Wittgenstein to say, among other things, that what it takes for a sentence to be a religious or a scientific proposition depends on the game of language in which it is used and, more importantly, that we cannot determine the rules of this game on account of objective properties, but only grasp it by playing it.<sup>90</sup> I even tend to think that if one understands Wittgenstein as directing his attention to the delimitation of a language-game which is specifically religious, one has misunderstood his point all together. Rather, he wants us to see how differently language can be used. His use of

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<sup>90</sup> This point is paralleled by Heidegger’s notion of ‘understanding’ and ‘language’ as a simultaneous existential categories, SuZ § 31, p. 147; § 34, 161.

adjectives such as ‘religious’ and ‘scientific’ serves an exemplary purpose, far from intending any strict definition.<sup>91</sup>

## 4.2 Does Truth Have a Nature?

Having dealt with the concepts of reference and evidence and found them less relevant for understanding religion philosophically than Soskice and Wolterstorff, it is time to attend to a concept of truth as something different from being merely a predicative indication of reference and evidence. I am thinking especially of the theory of truth worked out by Donald Davidson in his semantic holism.<sup>92</sup>

First of all, it might be noted that it is conventional in the study of religion to regard a religious discourse as making propositional claims to truth.<sup>93</sup> I will argue that this is more obvious in some respects than in others. Claims to truth may, for instance, be especially relevant in confessional religions,<sup>94</sup> whereas mythically oriented systems of meaning have nothing other than themselves to measure ‘truth’ against, for which reason it might be ill-conceived to speak of any truth-claim at all. Thus, speaking of

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**91** It *may* seem otherwise, if we stick to the student’s rendering of particular utterances such as “in a religious discourse we use such expressions as: ‘I believe that so and so will happen’ and use them differently to the way we use them in science” (op.cit. 57), but even here there is no positive indication for taking Wittgenstein to have a classificatory purpose in mind. The critical point is still about ‘use’.

**92** The following parts of this chapter, 4.2–4.6, will appear in a modified form in *Method & Theory For The Study of Religion*, 2015, forthcoming.

**93** This goes for phenomenology and philosophy of religion in general as, for instance, Ninian Smart who sees no alternative to a truth-false dichotomy (1970: 69), Wolterstorff, who, albeit with a slight reservation, speaks about propositional truth in religious discourse and the “commonality in obligations of rationality” (1983: 147), William J. Wainwright (1999: v; 149), who is interested in ‘the epistemic status of religious beliefs’, Michael J. Murray & Michael Rea (2008: xii) who similarly talk about ‘propositional justification’ of religious beliefs, and the list could be extended indefinitely. A similar approach, albeit in a more critical vein, permeates the comparative study of religion as most prominently stated perhaps in Frankenberry & Penner (1999, 3), and recently expressed, for instance, by Bruce Lincoln who finds it obvious to treat religious discourse according to their “truth claims” (2012, 5), and Tim Knepper who focuses on ‘reason-giving’ (2013, 22).

**94** As in the words of Foucault: “Christianity belongs to a very special type of religion, the religions which impose on those who practice them obligations of truth”, 1999, 169. And as Jeppe Sinding Jensen has pointed out: “All humans in all societies, cultures and religions have beliefs. That is beyond doubt, but do all cultures also *know* that they have beliefs? The answer, based on evidence from history, anthropology and the history of religions is: no. Do they all have terms for beliefs, true or false? No,” 2014b, 63. The late Historian of Religions Walter Burkert made a similar claim concerning Greek myth, stating that “[m]ythical thinking takes as operators neither class-inclusion nor the true/false dichotomy, but actions or sequences of actions. Logic, from Aristotle to the logic of sets and classes, is based on the nominal phrase: *S is P*; Socrates, insisting on the phrase *tí estin*, ‘What is it?’ definitely destroyed mythical thinking”, 1979, 24 f.

religious practice, even Kevin Schilbrack, who opts for a Davidsons' theory of truth (2014, 70–75), admits that we “might be able to find a religion that had not developed an explicit ontological justification for a given practice” (op.cit. 128). Still, he holds that “we will not find one that does not have even a prereflective understanding of the world ... that makes that practice intelligible” (op.cit. 129). That may very well be true, but what is actually claimed here? That every natural language must at some level imply a convention of truth, as Davidson has shown? Or that we best understand religion from this premise? Whereas I have no objection against the former, I am skeptical towards the latter.<sup>95</sup>

In Plato's dialogue *Ion*, for instance, Socrates tries in vain to urge the Homeric rhapsode to account for the truth-content of his discourse. Eventually, Socrates concludes his interrogation by ironically praising Ion for being divinely inspired, yet ignorant of any knowledge about the content of his discourse (Pl. *Ion* 541e). Ion doesn't seem to mind, though, for the *mania* (frenzy) to which Socrates relates the rhapsode's power of speech (535e) is customary for the epic recitation as an inspired ritual proceeding. What the audience reacts to, albeit much to the dissatisfaction of Plato (and Socrates), is not so much the content of what is said, but the emotive impact of the diction. Without implying that Ion is ignorant of epistemic criteria in general, it seems fair to claim that such criteria do not seem to pertain to the *religious* implication of his discourse.<sup>96</sup>

My point is that we should perhaps compare the performative dimension of the rhapsode's communicative ritual with other rituals that produce emotional states of harmony or possession, rather than look for the entire dimension of meaning in intellectualizing interpretations of myth along the lines of a Socratic attitude. The dimension I am thinking of is described by Roy Rappaport:

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<sup>95</sup> One may refer, for instance, to the relaxed, if not even tongue-in-cheek attitude, which is often enough shown by indigenous people against the apparent belief-content of their rituals; cf. the Balinese, cf. Geertz, 1993, 119, or the Siberian Yukaghir, cf. Willerslev, 2013, 50 f.

<sup>96</sup> In The Homeric *Iliad*, which I regard as a mythical discourse within an oral tradition, the implied poet beckons the Muses to let him know the truth of past events (more precisely, who among the kings were present at the campaign against Troy) inasmuch as it isn't the lot of mortals to know anything for certain, *Il.* 2.485–6. Apparently, the question of truth and knowledge is very central to this kind of religious discourse. Yet, the concept of truth at play here has very little to do with a concept of truth that satisfies empirical criteria of meaning (cf. also Albinus, 2013a, 184). As Wittgenstein and Davidson have pointed out (see below), our semantic concept of 'truth' implies 'error' as its antonym. Yet, the kind of truth transmitted by the Muses, insofar as they are willing to disclose it, does not include the possibility of error. The poet can be wrong, of course, but not the Muses. And if the poet gets it wrong, it is not because of a failing *knowledge*, but because of a failing *inspiration*. The whole 'problem of legitimacy' lies within the authority structure, not in a corrective or testable relation with mundane facts. This is, of course, no argument against putting all the weight on the 'emic' concept of truth, but if one chooses to do that, it has to be done with careful attention to the exact language game at stake. Truth is not just truth. Certainly Schilbrack seems to acknowledge that, cf. 2014, 73.

To sing with others, to move as they move in the performance of a ritual, is not merely to symbolize union. It is *in and of itself* to reunite in the reproduction of a larger order. Unison does not merely symbolize that order but indicates it and its acceptance. The participants do not simply communicate to each other *about* that order but commune *with* each other *within* it. (1999, 220)

Whatever propositional content we may think of as underlying the motivation for engaging in such dance rituals, it has no obvious bearing on the actual communing of the participants. The communing, which forms an essential part of the religious cult, is effected by song and dance, not by any truth-content.<sup>97</sup> This doesn't change the fact, of course, that every human language harbors a propositional language. Otherwise, there would be no communication about physical reality and other objective phenomena. It is also beyond doubt, however, that references are made all the time to entities for which there is no evidence but a symbolic one. In some religions this symbolization amounts to a dogmatic and confessional commitment to truth; in others the concept of truth seems to play an entirely different role as, for instance, among the Nahuatl Aztecs for whom "[t]he truth of divine orders as well as divine beings is established in ritual" (Rappaport 1999, 345). The question is whether it is, per definition, an explicit or implied concept of truth which is believed to explain rituals and symbolization, or whether it could also be the other way round (cf. Schilbrack's point in this respect, 2014, 36). I am not inclined to go as far as Dan Sperber, who has famously denounced the *meaning* of ritual acts and religious symbols in general, but I endorse a statement such as the following: "A representation is symbolic precisely to the extent that it is not entirely explicable, that is to say, expressible by semantic means" (Sperber 1975, 113). As for the underlying workings of symbolism Sperber seems to have in mind I would not want to dismiss the concept of meaning, though, but rather go along with Rappaport's tentative, and less positivistic, view that

The location, within human organic processes, of the boundary between the domains of the physical and the meaningful is not well known but cannot be a sharp one. It is plausible to believe that the very obscurity of this region is one basis of notions concerning the occult efficacy of ritual words and acts. (1999, 113)

Let it suffice to say for now that words and acts within the context of religion may also work by other means than through a message of cognitive content. I am willing to accept Schilbrack's argument "that one cannot make sense of religious practice without the category of belief" (2014, 78), but I am reluctant to let Davidson's theory

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<sup>97</sup> Rappaport's view seems exemplary of the 'symbolic' understanding of religious 'meaning' that Hans Penner directs his critique against (2009, 120), but he clearly overstates his case when he identifies every such attempt as functionalist and takes it to imply the view that "religion is nonrational, void of propositional attitudes" (ibid.), which, of course, it is not. Penner is inclined to think that religious meaning must either be understood as propositional claims to truth or not understood at all. It is this 'either/or' that I find unfortunate and out of touch with the ways in which language is actually used.

of truth define the connotations of this ‘category’. However, in order to speak meaningfully about ‘belief’ in the first place, we must presuppose shared conditions of meaning at some level. How do we locate this level, if not in the conditions for some utterance to be true, that is, in that which is generally believed? I shall postpone a tentative answer for the moment and attempt first to understand properly the concept and implications of ‘generality’.

Insofar as we all live in the same world, under the same basic human conditions, we are, in principle, able to communicate however deep the cultural barriers may run, and part of our ability to understand each other depends on what we can *agree on* as true or not. The premises for *this* general level of intercultural understanding – or radical interpretation, as Davidson calls it – can be viewed, at least in part, from the angle of semantic truth-conditions. What I question, however, is that the propositional question of truth should be the *only* available means of coming to understand instances of *meaning and belief* in a context which is culturally or historically alien to us. If for a moment, I imagine myself having gained an intimate familiarity with a foreign culture (having been accustomed to their way of life during a permanent residence among them), I picture a communicative interaction in which points of truth recede in the background and matters of daily importance – immediate references, for instance – take their place. This entails no denial of the underlying significance of various religious truth-commitments, but I doubt that they should be the only or even the most important key to a mutual understanding. In this respect, nothing is different from the way in which we already, in our own cultural setting, react towards propositional attitudes on a daily basis without taking any implied truth content into account (although I admit that in most cases it is simply taken for granted). The point is not whether or not a semantic convention of truth is implicitly at work, but rather whether or not it is *constitutive* of meaning. Even *if* we should come to grant that such a truth convention is inevitable, then how do we come to terms with the different rules for the use of ‘truth’ in different cultures? What is needed for understanding religious forms of life is a more explicitly pragmatic approach than the one Donald Davidson takes in his semantic theory of radical interpretation.

### 4.3 Davidson’s Truth-Semantics in the Study of Religion

The semantic holism, or truth-semantics, developed by Davidson has exerted some influence in recent theorizing within the study of religion.<sup>98</sup> And for good reason, since it may help to demystify a notion of religious language as being unintelligible to others than native speakers. If the *sui generis* notion of religion is taken to imply that

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<sup>98</sup> See, for instance, Godlove, 1989 passim.; Sinding Jensen 2003 passim.; 2004, 238 ff; Frankenberry (ed.) 2002; Scott G. Davis, 2007; Gardiner & Engler 2008; 2010; 2012; Schilbrack, 2014, 70 ff.

one must obtain an insider-position in order to fully understand religion, then Davidson's radical interpretation fruitfully serves to challenge this position. Thus, Mark Q. Gardiner and Steven Engler find inspiration in Davidson for suggesting that we should steer between the "Charybdis of naïve correspondence and the Scylla of an alternative conception of truth" (2010, 11). This is an intriguing statement for several reasons. First of all, it deprecates Nancy Frankenberry's and Hans Penner's reading of Davidson to the effect of "suggesting that religious language is false by virtue of not corresponding to its objects" (Gardiner & Engler 2008, 189, cf. Frankenberry, 2002, 180 f; 185 ff; Penner, 2002, 169).<sup>99</sup> "[W]ith Davidson and Brandom", Gardiner and Engler say, "we are far past a correspondence view of truth and referential semantics", the reason being that "[r]eference, for both Davidson and Brandom, is subordinate to truth, not vice versa" (ibid.). We have to tread carefully here, though. Through most of his philosophical career, Davidson was not unequivocally hostile to a notion of correspondence between the use of language and 'the fact of the matter'. In fact, he repeatedly criticized the pragmatic objection (to a correspondence theory of truth) for illegitimately avoiding the question of the prerogative of 'truth' as a condition of meaning (e.g., 2001, 137 ff).<sup>100</sup>

From the outset Davidson has been committed to the view that a post-metaphysical philosophy has to begin with a theory of language. Hence, by adopting Tarski's definition of truth (Convention T) for all natural languages,<sup>101</sup> he has gradually developed a semantic theory of truth with a seeming relevance for cultural studies in general. As the theory came to enjoy circulation among scholars of various kinds, it was taken to imply that the meaning and interpretation of any possible proposition in any natural language was directly or indirectly dependent on the language user's *knowing* what would make it true. However, bearing Gardiner's and Engler's phrase in mind, it would then only take the exchange of 'reference subordinate to truth' with 'reference subordinate to language' to make Davidson's point look like Peter Winch's famous dictum, namely that "[r]eality is not what gives language sense. What is real

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<sup>99</sup> Gabriel Levy likewise criticizes Penner for confusing an epistemic concept of truth with a semantic one (2012, 150), and the criticism seems generally justified, although, at some point, Penner actually takes Davidson to be arguing "that there is nothing in the world that makes a sentence true", 1999, 479.

<sup>100</sup> Along the way he didn't hesitate to state that "truth is correspondence with the way things are" (2001, 139) and claimed his theory of truth to be in unrestricted accordance with realism (op.cit. 138). However, things (including statements) are not always what they seem, and it takes a far closer look at Davidson's holistic view of language, as well as the specific context, to appreciate the implications of this provocatively tinged announcement.

<sup>101</sup> Basically, the Polish philosopher and mathematician Alfred Tarski developed a logical definition of truth in formalized languages, pointing out that the condition of truth (T) concerning any proposition (p) in a given language (first order) is provided only by its repetition in a meta-language (second order). This can be stated such that "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white", or in or formalized form as "p" is true if and only if p.



and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has" (1999, 346). I am not sure Davidson would feel comfortable with being associated too closely with Winch, although the latter adopted the former's 'principle of charity' in his own approach.<sup>102</sup> However, whereas Winch stands accused of cultural relativism,<sup>103</sup> Davidson uses the principle of charity to emphasize that we must presume that we have the ability to interpret the propositions of a different language inasmuch as they pertain to the same conditions of truth as our own. "If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behavior of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards", Davidson writes, "we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything" (1984, 136). Clearly, Winch would not want to say that at all. Still, it is not immediately obvious why Davidson's theory of meaning – or radical interpretation – takes up a middle position between esoteric criteria of meaning, on the one hand, and a correspondence theory of truth, on the other. Actually, Richard Rorty should prove right that Davidson's anti-pragmatic polemic was likely to "encourage those who still think, as Davidson does not, 'that there is something important in the realist conception of truth'" (1997, 69; cf. Davidson, 1990, 304). Frankenberry, for one, shares this realist view and finds it in accordance with Davidson's notion that every comprehensible language must rest on *facts* (2002, 187).

In order to clarify whether it is Gardiner and Engler's or Frankenberry's reading of Davidson which must be defended, it might be helpful to take shifts of emphasis in Davidson's philosophy into account. Thus, in 1969 he took pains to defend Austin's "purified version of the correspondence theory of truth" (1984, 54) against Strawson's arguments for a strict elimination. However, he was also indebted to the principles of Tarski's truth-theorem (op.cit. 38), in which referential implications were treated in respect of their meta-linguistic nature. The semantic resource for claiming something to be true was not to be found in the world but in language itself. However, while continuing to work out the internal principles of semantics, he never stopped speaking about the co-variance between the meaning of sentences and certain state-of-affairs in the world. Although he repudiated the dualism of scheme and content as early as in 1974 (op.cit. 183 ff), it didn't prevent him from keeping on about propositional truth "according to discoverable changes in the world" (op.cit. 136). Jürgen Habermas, to whose counter-position I shall return in a moment, thus interprets Davidson's externalist view to imply that language is anchored in the world by way of "intelli-

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**102** For arguments that goes directly against the form of cultural relativism associated with Winch, see Davidson, 1984, 185 f.

**103** As Kevin Schilbrack has shown in an admirable clarification of Winch's position, he actually allows for universals such as logical consistency and basic existential concerns. The allegation of cultural relativism still stands, however, in the sense that "the logical and the existential universals are purely formal" rather than substantial (2009, 408).



gent processing of causally generated sensory stimuli" (2008, 61). Contrary to Winch, Habermas condones the basic view that a theory of interpretation needs shared standards of rationality, but he takes exception to the reductive naturalism implied in Davidson's version of this principle (*ibid.*).

As a matter of fact, I venture to say that both Frankenberg and Habermas are blinded by their focus on Davidson's objection to pragmatist slogans. Even though Davidson himself confesses – tongue-in-cheek – to be a realist (2001, 138), he is a realist in non-metaphysical, or one might even say in an anti-realist, way.<sup>104</sup> What he tries to bring out, at least from the late 70s and onwards, is not that the material world infuses language with meaning, but rather that the way in which we agree in using sentences about the world shows that we know their meaning (that is, the criterion of truth pertaining to any possible proposition) and believe them to be largely true in practice. This becomes eminently clear in a text called "Reality without Reference", where he states that the condition of truth "depends on the semantic features of the elements [predicatives, names, connectives, quantifiers, functors]" (1984, 216), while "reference drops out. It plays no essential role in explaining the relation between language and reality" (*op.cit.* 225).

But if the use of language doesn't contain a direct method of making a reference to the world, how and why, then, does the semantic truth-commitment make up a strict criterion of interpretation and translation? Why is it that an alien language can only be meaningful if we can recognize the 'foreign' criterion of truth as compatible with our own? Clearly, Davidson grants that a "speech community" is defined by agreement in "theories of interpretation" rather than metaphysical agreement with the world (1984, 135). So why will different speech communities have to refer to the same basic standards of truth? What is the exact argument against there being other points of semantic convergence than that of truth?

One may wonder, for instance, whether Davidson's own principle of charity (*op.cit.* 137) is charitable enough or, rather, charitable on the right premises? Does Winch not have a point in claiming that we cannot be sure whether or not we know what people of another culture actually mean by their utterances or behavior before we accustom ourselves to their way of life? And even if we consent to the necessity of some common means of communicative abilities and ways of thinking, how are we to know that 'our own standards' are immediately accessible to ourselves? Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of the prejudice of a non-prejudiced stance pertaining to Enlightenment reason makes a serious claim to the contrary (1972, 256 f). Hans Herbert

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**104** My reading of Davidson's orientation towards the turn of the Century is, in this respect, in line with the interpretations of Rorty (1991a, 126; 1997, 50) and Sandbothe (2004, 241), and expressed by Davidson himself in his attempt to show how it is coherence that yields correspondence rather than the other way around (2001, 137). In an 'afterthought', however, he exchanges 'coherence' with 'the totality of beliefs' in response to Rorty, *op.cit.* 155.

Kögler, who has adopted basic principles of Gadamer's view, points to the constitutive significance of a critically 'productive dialogue' supposed to bring out the shared meaning potentials between the two parties (1999, 19–36). In this respect, he makes use of Putnam's nuanced arguments against relativism (cf. Putnam 1981, 117). The point is that although successful interpretation and communication require basic *concepts* that both parties have in common, they do not necessarily entail shared *conceptions* (Kögler, op.cit. 165 f). This implies that we may learn something new about the ways in which language can be used, including the use of 'truth', simply by engaging in open dialogue. What I find less promising in Kögler's approach is the way in which he adopts a theory of power as a framework of critical interpretation (op.cit. 215 ff). At least, it remains unclear how the *objectifying* perspective of this theory fits the *intersubjective* condition of interpretation. Rather than following the hermeneutic route of critically bracketing our own standards of rationality, I shall opt for a Wittgensteinian view, whereby I distance myself just as much from Winch's interpretation of Wittgenstein's 'form of life' as from his interpretation of Davidson's principle of charity. The main point, however, is that Davidson's concept of truth, which may fruitfully ground a *semantic* theory of language, in some respects becomes a stumbling block for appreciating the pragmatic implications of a communicative practice. Thus, in order to get to Wittgenstein (that is, another reading of Wittgenstein than that which is implicated in Davidson's own position), a detour *via* some implications stemming from Habermas' theory of communicative action seems required.

#### 4.4 Habermas' Wittgensteinian Objection

Davidson basically argues that language obtains the meanings of words and sentences by an original triangular situation in which two human beings get the same stimulus from the observed surroundings (1984, 125 ff). Habermas criticizes this observational notion of meaning for failing to take the more pragmatic aspects of the constitution of meanings into account (2008, 61). However, Habermas does not seem to acknowledge that Davidson actually distances himself from the way in which Quine assumes a language-neutral stimulus pattern as the cause of linguistic meaning (2001, 143). As Davidson himself puts it: "One can locate individual objects, if the sentence happens to name or describe them, but even such location makes sense relative only to a frame of reference" that already exists (1990, 303). Schilbrack, who has taken proper notice of this point, correctly relates it to Davidson's refutation of a distinction between scheme and content (2014, 160), which means that the mentioned 'frame of reference' has nothing to do with any immediate (i.e., *unmediated*) access to the world *as it really is*. Contrary to Habermas' interpretation of Davidson, Schilbrack takes the externalist position to imply a view of an "unmediated contact with a shared world" (op.cit. 163). While I find this line of thought rather promising,

I cannot but take it to be more in line with Heidegger (op.cit. 158; 162) and Wittgenstein (op.cit. 159) than Davidson.<sup>105</sup>

After all, we still find the latter claiming that “in the simplest and most basic cases, words and sentences derive their meanings from the objects and circumstances in whose presences they were learned” (2001, 44, quoted also by Habermas (op.cit.) in support of his own interpretation). The question is, of course, what the very learning process implies as a condition of possibility for deriving meaning from anything in the first place? But here Davidson deserts us. When it comes to specifying the pragmatic implications of the use of language, it is of little use to consult a semantic theory of meaning. What Davidson brings to bear on his own argument is rather a second-order view of language in relation to which an empirical criterion serves to determine the possibility of interpretation. It is noteworthy that this semantic-empirical determination takes place without implying initial knowledge of concrete beliefs (1984, 133 f; 137 f; 143 ff). At least Davidson claimed in the 70's that the workings of the truth criterion can be verified by observing actual correspondence between the use of certain sentences and certain states of affairs in the world (op.cit. 135 f; 152). Whatever the changes Davidson's view of language, meaning, and truth underwent, he seemed to hold on to this empirical criterion of agreement between language users.

But how can such a view free itself from the charge of putting the cart before the horse? Habermas may eventually be right to object that Davidson leaves out the pragmatic implications of symbolic meaning required for two persons to be able to agree on the connection between things and words – or between states of affairs and propositions (2008, 60). Two subjects can only detect objective similarities if they have already identified the respects in which the similarities can count as such (op.cit. 65). This point holds, even if Habermas seems to have drawn Davidson too far into something that looks like referentialism. The form of semantics which Davidson has developed engages a criterion of empirical verification the intelligibility of which is simply presupposed, but in actual fact uncounted for. Instead of bringing to light how the understanding of a proposition is possible in the first place, Davidson claims, at some point, that T-sentences<sup>106</sup> “can consist entirely of facts about behavior and attitudes of speakers in relation to sentences” before any interpretation (of those T-sentences) has even begun (1984, 133). The pragmatic insufficiency of this view becomes even clearer, when Davidson accepts the need for dispensing with the presupposition that a person must hold every of her sentences to be true as, for instance, in cases of

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**105** The same goes for Scott Davis' presentation of a Davidsonian perspective in the study of religion, which, at the same time, draws on Wittgenstein's point about the *shared practice* of language, 2007, 207.

**106** T-sentences are sentences which are interpretable according to the condition of truth, i.e., convention T.

lies, irony, and jokes (op.cit. 135). If the condition of truth constitutes the decisive criterion of meaning, how is it possible for us to discern the deviations from this criterion as anything but nonsense? Davidson claims that it only takes the detection of a given propositional attitude to differentiate the specific mode of speech from the basic commitment to truth under relevant circumstances (ibid.).<sup>107</sup> Yet, while this might be a defensible view on its own, it doesn't account for our social capability to detect these 'deviant' attitudes, as it were.

Wittgenstein might have found himself struck by a similar difficulty when Piero Sraffa, with whom he was engaged in a discussion about grammar, suddenly brushed "the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the finger-tips of one hand" (Monk, 1990, 261). This is a gesture which for Neapolitans means something like disgust or contempt. The point is that Sraffa used it to challenge Wittgenstein's view of language by adding: "What is the logical form of *that*?" As the anecdote has it, this question broke the spell of *Tractatus* (ibid.). Wittgenstein realized that something was a stake here that he hadn't taken sufficiently into account. Irrespective of this story, it is well known that the later Wittgenstein came to disavow his earlier verification principle of meaning (cf. PO, 59 f)<sup>108</sup> and exchanged it with a pragmatic view of language in which methods of verification, along with commands, drawings, jokes, prayers, etc., were meaningful in accordance with being language games (PI § 23). In this view of language the point is not to strip an utterance of its propositional attitude in order to see the implicit condition of truth more clearly, but rather to abandon the whole premise of searching for a single principle responsible for the structure of language and its use. It is not the holism of Davidson's semantics, however, which is at odds with the pragmatics of the later Wittgenstein, but the ordering principle of truth which, from a certain point of view, seems committed to the same dream of transparency as that which made Wittgenstein conceive of the *Tractatus*.

Voicing his skepticism against the fruitfulness of a theory of meaning, Rorty articulates his difference between himself and Davidson by saying: "Why should we not just do what Wittgenstein did – distinguish between uses of linguistic expressions as needed?" (1997, 65). I certainly think he has a point, but I would also argue

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**107** Robert Brandom, who is much in line with Davidson on this point, acknowledges the problem, admitting the need for differentiating between the inferential role played by represented contents, on the one hand, and the role played by representing, on the other (1994, 279). Yet he still reacts against what he calls 'a social-phenomenalist approach': "For what is distinctive of such an approach is precisely its treating the norms that govern our discursive conduct as instituted ultimately by our *attitudes*. How, then, can such an approach hope to make intelligible a notion of attitude-*transcendent* discursive norms?" op.cit. 280.

**108** The early Wittgenstein's principle of verification is, for instance, rendered in a conversation with Waismann from the Vienna Circle as a criterion of meaning such that "[t]he sense of a proposition is the method of its verification" (cf. Waismann, 1979, 227).

that, in respect of these uses, we should take more notice of the differentiation of validity criteria we find in Habermas than Rorty – and perhaps Wittgenstein – would allow for.

In *Philosophical Investigation*, Wittgenstein embraces the indeterminacy of meaning, contrary to his views in *Tractatus*. What I want to keep in focus, here, is that this pragmatic turn corresponds with Rorty's friendly reservation towards Davidson (1997, 49 ff). Instead of trying to exhaust the content of the concept of truth, as Davidson does, Rorty points to the many uses of 'truth' (op.cit. 66). Proclaiming himself to be a 'Wittgensteinian', Rorty objects to Davidson's notion that a theory of truth-conditions has to be internalized by a language user as a precondition for understanding and using language in the first place (op.cit. 68). In using language, we just go along, Rorty claims, much like when riding a bicycle (op.cit. 63). To use Wittgenstein's own terms: 'Language games' are confined only by our 'form of life'. The game of telling a joke is no less foundational than the game of showing something to be true. At the same time, Wittgenstein clearly adopts a holistic view of language, as evidenced by his decision to "call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a 'language game'" (PI § 7). The example given in this paragraph specifically turns on "a primitive idea of the way language functions" (PI § 2) which points to an imagined practice of learning the meaning of words by repeating certain names after a teacher who simultaneously points at corresponding objects. The insufficiency of this picture is revealed by acknowledging that the learner must know what pointing *means* in the first place: "[T]he pointing occurs in the use of the words too and not merely in learning the use" (PI § 9). When two people look or point at something they are already dependent on a symbolic interaction in order to know that they intend the same. This is also the thrust of Habermas' critique of Davidson, and I think it is justified even if Davidson himself emphatically refers to a convention of language *use*. That both agree on the interrelatedness of meaning and use doesn't change the fact that Davidson puts semantics before pragmatics. Yet, to derive the use of words from the knowledge of truth-conditions is question-begging as long as it remains unclear how the very concept of knowledge is obtained in the first place, that is, how we initially learn to apply the rules for speaking about and having knowledge.

If the exclusive emphasis of the semantic truth-condition is abandoned and substituted with rules of using language that we have learned, and learned to follow *blindly*, as social beings (cf. Wittgenstein PI § 219), our ability to react to various propositional attitudes is located on the same level as our ability to understand a mathematical calculus or acknowledge under what conditions a sentence may say something true. This may imply that our ability to communicate successfully across cultural barriers rests on the openness of playing a game rather than on inflexible semantic criteria.

In his *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*, now published as the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein discusses toward the end

the possibility of recognizing “the genuineness of expressions of feelings” (PI, II, § 355) and, while realizing that this genuineness cannot be proved (§ 357), he talks about the sensation of an “imponderable evidence” (§ 358), for which we are incapable to give any descriptive account, not because “language has no word for it” (§ 360), but because it stems from experience rather than from a calculus of meaning (§ 355).<sup>109</sup>

By adopting this view I may seem to open up for the kind of relativism of which Peter Winch have been deemed guilty, namely by putting too much weight on rules of experience that apply to a given situation (say, an encounter between members from two different cultures) rather than presupposing regiments intrinsic to the semantic nature of *any* language. If there are no ordering standards of rationality that we can rely on in our exchange of words, how can we ever be sure that we understand one another? In this respect, we might find the guidance we need in the tripartite differentiation of validity criteria conceptualized by Habermas along the lines of Kant, Weber, and Piaget (1984, 68 ff; 157 ff). Against Winch he argues that the particularity of worldviews doesn’t entail that the idea of *truth* is likewise of a particular and incompatible nature (op.cit. 58).<sup>110</sup> Like Davidson, Habermas locates the principle of truth in criteria of referring to the physical conditions of the world (1973, 212), yet only as one separate dimension of meaning.<sup>111</sup> The physical conditions are conditions that we all share, irrespective of our cultural background, and

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**109** Wittgenstein does not deny that this kind of recognition can be learned by ‘tips’ and imitation, but “[w]hat one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them rightly. Unlike calculating rules” § 355.

**110** Contrary to Davidson, Habermas emphasizes the difference between the truth criteria (*Wahrheitskriterien*) of a mythical and a modern worldview, though he doesn’t want to imply that the very idea of truth is incompatible (1984: 58). What we regard as criteria for claiming something to be true from a differentiated worldview still opens for the possibility of coming to agreement with natives of ‘a mythical culture’ about the shared reality of the world (ibid.), even though their beliefs are fundamentally different. See, for instance, Rappaport (1999, 345), as mentioned above.

**111** Habermas draws an analogy between a worldview and a portrait in respect of neither being a representation in the sense of a map that represents the landscape by being more or less accurate, nor being propositions which can either be true or false: “A portrait offers rather an angle of vision from which the person represented appears in a certain way” (1984, 58). However, a worldview differs from a portrait by making *possible* “utterances that admit of truth” (ibid.). Whereas a portrait is a self-enclosed image of the world, the worldview establishes, at least indirectly, an access to a culturally independent reality (ibid.). While I agree with Habermas in pointing out the non-propositional character of portraits and worldviews, I am not entirely sure what he means by referring to “utterances that admit of truth” (*wahrheitsfähige Äusserungen*). It seems to me that such qualification implies the possibility of correction, which, however, doesn’t pertain to a mythical worldview in Habermas’ own eyes. Consequently, the analogy between a portrait and a mythical worldview seems to hold in a more comprehensive sense than the generalization suggested by Habermas allows for.

as such they form a frame of reference that allows for intercultural communication on the premises of objective criteria of validity. While this may eventually show Habermas to be more of an externalist than Davidson in respect of the referential meaning of empirical data, it also displays a pragmatic awareness concerning the various uses of language which appear underdetermined, and secondary, in Davidson's semantics.

Thus, Habermas speaks only of an analogy between the criteria of validity in truth-pretending assertions, on the one hand, and normative statements appealing to rightness, on the other. The third criterion of validity, pertaining to the truthfulness of expressive or subjective statements, stands apart inasmuch as it cannot be redeemed discursively in the same manner. Nonetheless, it is integrated in the shared conditions of communicative rationality to the extent that the social abilities of each subject are formed by an individuation process which includes the social criteria of communicative articulacy and normative reliability. Drawing on George Herbert Mead in this respect (cf. Mead 1967), Habermas claims that by being able to take the attitude of 'the generalized other', the individual is not only committed to truthfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit*), the violation of which will be disclosed in the long run, but that the whole range of possible propositional attitudes is already imbedded in the matrix of socialized behavior (1987, 3 ff). For Habermas, this matrix is, first of all, constituted by the use of language as a vehicle for normative commitments basically oriented towards mutual understanding (op.cit. 39). All communicative acts are divided between the rational aims of 1) coming to a justified knowledge of the physical world, 2) coming to agreement on norms between all affected parties, and finally 3) reliability of subjective attitudes and authenticity of ethical preferences. Although this differentiation has only emerged as indispensable standards for a communicative reason in the course of historical learning processes (revealing Habermas' Hegelian stance), it is crucial to his argument that it is structurally imbedded in the social nature of language and only temporarily submerged by the power of sacred norms in a given culture (op.cit., chapter 3, especially 107 ff).

Habermas emphasizes the fact that in practice the semantic restrictions pertaining to these judgmental criteria of communicative rationality are intertwined, and that the meaning potential easily flows from one to the other according to the propositional attitude of the speaker. Yet, the crucial point about the implied attitude of communicative rationality is that it always stands to the hearer to make claims concerning the rational validity of a statement (1984, 295 ff). Whenever that happens, the communicative action turns into a discursive exchange of arguments, in which the criterion of rationality, appropriate for the point of disagreement, are to be brought out. Otherwise, the interlocutors simply communicate without necessarily giving any thought to justification. This surely doesn't preclude an implied assertion – and, accordingly, a principle of truth – but the crucial question is whether or not convention T in this respect takes up the constitutive role of communication, or mutual understanding,



Davidson ascribes to it.<sup>112</sup> According to Richard Rorty who has often been in dialogue with both Davidson<sup>113</sup> and Habermas<sup>114</sup> on this matter, it doesn't.

## 4.5 Rorty's Concept of Truth

Although Rorty basically agrees with Davidson's non-representational concept of truth, he is too influenced by the later Wittgenstein to regard this concept as anything but a predicate of pragmatic significance. In fact, he even regards Davidson's own refutation of a 'dualism of scheme and content' as a crucial step in this direction (1991a, 126).<sup>115</sup> He also acknowledges, however, that Davidson dissociates himself from the pragmatist camp by denouncing a concept of truth as mere assertibility under certain conditions (op.cit.; cf. Davidson, 1984, xviii). Rorty regrets that Davidson clings instead to a theory of truth which he finds to be the only possible way of reconstructing "the underlying order" of meaning and interpretation in language (Rorty, 1997, 65). For Rorty, however, the only philosophical point which can be made about 'truth' is that it is used in so many ways. It cannot be reduced to an ordering principle *for language*. Rather, it is used along with other words *in language*. Rorty thus seems to endorse Davidson's concept of truth only in a sense so vague that it does not serve as a substantial condition of meaning and interpretation.

Instead, Rorty keeps to his self-proclaimed Wittgensteinian view of truth as basically a predicate of pragmatic significance (1991a, 128). Truth is not an essentially qualifying property of the statement but, in most cases, a compliment paid to it when used to the acknowledgment of everyone concerned. Thus, the truth-condition simply parallels other values bestowed on utterances depending on the context of use and the cultural universe in which it is embedded. The false belief in its epistemic prerogative harks back "to the bad Kantian idea that discourse about physical objects is the paradigm case of making truth claims, and that all other areas of discourse must be thought of as 'non-cognitive'" (2002b, 73). Walter Benjamin has launched a related critique in a short essay, *The Program of the Coming Philosophy*, where he claimed

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**112** While finding much inspiration in Davidson's holistic view of language for employing a semantic theory in the study of religion, Jeppe Sinding Jensen nevertheless finds "the *truth question*" to be "the most uninteresting issue in philosophical debates about semantics, as viewed from the perspective of a scholar of religion", 2004, 239.

**113** The implications of the protracted debates between Rorty and Davidson concerning the concept of truth clearly oversteps the boundaries of this article, but an eminent overview of its various stages is provided by Mike Sandbothe, 2004, 235–258.

**114** See, for instance, Rorty's objection to Habermas' notion of justification, 2002a, 231; 245.

**115** According to Mike Sandbothe: "Rorty's *radicalization* of Davidson's position consists in his having drawn from it the consequence that truth need no longer be taken seriously as a philosophical issue once the explanatory notion of truth has been dismissed", 2003, 239.



that “[t]he commonly shared notion of sensuous (and intellectual) knowledge in our epoch, as well as in the Kantian and pre-Kantian epochs, is very much a mythology” (1996, 103). His specific point, which I shall elaborate on further below (cf. chapter 5 below), pertains to the variability of cognition, the common denominator of which is not “*objecta* ‘placed before’” the subject, but *experience* (ibid.), that is, an *unmediated* experience. And I should like to think that this would be somewhat in line with Schilbrack’s concept (2014, 158 ff), which is, in part, influenced by Wittgenstein (op.cit. 165), and concerned with the perspectival side of cognition, that is, of aspects, rather than object-determination (op.cit. 166).<sup>116</sup>

Returning to Rorty, his point is that there is no independent state of affairs that determines the literal meaning of ‘truth’, but only various ways in which the predicate is used. Invoking Hegel and Brandom, Rorty assures us that “there is nothing special about natural science (or better, to the discourse constituted by the union of the logical space of everyday transcultural common sense with that of modern natural science) which entitles it to the term truth” (ibid.). What there is, according to Rorty, who draws specifically on Brandom in this context, are ‘canonical designators’ within ‘logical spaces’ (as also hinted at in the quoted bracket above). On the general level, these spaces are restricted by any given cultural context and the concrete purpose they are fulfilling (op.cit. 53). More specifically, various levels of cultural politics determine what it is reasonable to speak about and how to speak about it as, for instance, in discourses about God, marital norms, or the properties of molecules. It is not reasonable, on the other hand, to ask whether or not God, or marital norms, or the properties of molecules, exist or not.

Related to the question of religious truth, Rorty puts a pragmatic twist on Davidson’s truth semantics, condoning William James’s view that “truth and reality exist for the sake of social practices, rather than vice versa” (op.cit. 57). The illusion of natural science is to think that our beliefs can – and shall – be informed by what is true, when this ‘truth’ is nothing but the way in which we make nature apprehensible and manageable to our practical and technical purposes. What counts in cases of religion as well as in science are the advantages we gain by talking about certain entities, irrespective of the referential criteria we might put to use in the process.<sup>117</sup> Using

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**116** To avoid dualism, Schilbrack avers that “it is better to see concepts as the pragmatist see them, namely, as tools for picking out and characterizing that aspect of the world on which one finds it useful to focus”, ibid. However, I cannot make this view fit with what Schilbrack refers to as “Davidson’s argument that re-establishing unmediated touch with the world provides for the possibility of truth in metaphysics” (2014, 172). In the article, to which Schilbrack refers, Davidson speaks semantically about the “truth conditions of each sentence (relative to the circumstances of its utterance) *on the basis of its composition*”, 1984, 202 (italics mine), which is a far cry from Schilbrack’s pragmatic point.

**117** Schilbrack actually locates himself in a position much like Rorty’s by condoning Peter Berger’s view that definitions are neither true or false, but only more or less useful, 2014, 116. But then it seems that he dispenses with the principle of an underlying truth-claim. Yet, he found such principle indis-

the example of authority – i.e., God for theology and Reality for science – Rorty aims to reveal the epistemic question as being really a matter of interests. “All attempts to name such an authority which is superior to that of society”, Rorty says, more or less on behalf of Brandom, “are disguised moves in the game of cultural politics” (op.cit. 58). The similarity between three different politics such as 1) religious disputes referring to Holy Scriptures, 2) opposing counsels in the court referring to the Law, and 3) battles between scientists referring to the nature of Reality, is anything but superficial in Rorty’s eyes. Similarly, what *matters*, according to Brandom, is the game that is played (due to inferential criteria of validity), not the isolated nature of the reference (1994, 69 f; 277 f).<sup>118</sup> Brandom is not so much making a separate claim about ‘truth’ as he is trying to make explicit the kind of exchange it involves to engage in communication. Thus, by a ‘deontic scorekeeping’ of the use of propositions (1994, 141 ff) – by giving and taking reasons while giving marks to those that conform with the recognized norms – we are in practice concerned with a reliable outcome of communication rather than with the nature of reality (op.cit. 206 ff). That certain language games enable us to deal successfully with the material world should not distract us from the fact that, in other games, we may just as effectively deal with legal or spiritual matters. Thus, Brandom and Rorty may be seen to converge in the view on pragmatics to the extent that whether or not the physical world differs from imaginary ones by being in structural accordance with the theories and vocabulary of science is not the point; the point is, to what extent can we rely on the correlation of certain propositions with certain state of affairs in the process of attempting to solve certain problems.

If this is a loyal, though unjustifiably short, presentation of their pragmatic stance, I can agree to its implications only to some extent. Unresolved questions

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pensable in relation to a religious practice, op.cit. 71. I must admit that I see this as a case of wanting to have the cake and eat it too.

**118** It is also worth mentioning, however, that Brandom departs profoundly from Rorty in that he wants to secure “a semantically adequate notion of correct inference” in objective truth-conditions, that is, “how things actually are, independently of how they are taken to be”, 1994, 137. The inferentialist order of explanation Brandom adopts for his pragmatic analysis is one thing; another, however, is the real content of our “ordinary empirical beliefs”, *ibid.* Habermas objects to this stance that it sits ill with the perspective of reconstructing the praxis of speaking (*Sprachpraxis*) from within, and thus violates a phenomenalist attitude, 2003, 138. My guess is that Brandom would respond by confessing his reserve towards a phenomenalist position, cf. 1994, 280. Still, I would side with Habermas in saying that the “language-immanent way of proceeding obliges the theorist to speak not of truth and reference but of how truth and reference *appear* to an interpreter attributing truth claims and references to other players”, 2003, 138. Habermas’ crucial point is that Brandom’s commitment to a final externalism is in actual agreement with his initial choice to view meaning and reason from a third person perspective (similar to Davidson) rather than from a dialogical point of view. “Because he does not even consider the possibility of a dialogical attitude toward a second person, Brandom is ultimately compelled to dissolve the internal relation between objectivity and intersubjectivity in favor of a ‘priority of the objective’” (Habermas, 2008, 74).

clearly remain. How can Rorty, for instance, in keeping with Brandom as it seems, speak of social preconditions as a fact when, at the same time, he has reduced the meaning of facts to the advantage of their use in communication? That Rorty may have realized this circularity and merely finds it *useful* to speak thus may find support in the fact that he takes care to only “[s]uppose that one accepts the thesis of the ontological primacy of the social”, rather than stating this belief outright (2002b, 58). Be that as it may, it makes no actual difference. Rorty speaks *as if* the possibility of meaning is, in reality, confined by the context of its proper use which, on the large scale, amounts to the context of culture. Yet, he has played all the cards that should have enabled him to justify this stance. If, in fact, we are fundamentally bound by our cultural context, we wouldn’t even know,<sup>119</sup> just as we have no access to the ‘supposed’ correspondence between propositions and state of affairs. We are not *in a position* to know, and therefore, Davidson’s principle of charity would fail in our own back yard if we fully embraced Rorty’s view: we would have no clue whether or not we are rational beings! Rorty’s response would probably be: Does it matter? Whereupon I would say: yes, it does matter, not in *any* respect, but in respect of the validity criteria invoked for a proposition to be reliably true and not merely justified on local standards (a point to which Brandom and Habermas would agree although on different grounds). Rorty’s inclination to the contrary means that he eventually seems to share the same problem of cultural relativism as Winch.<sup>120</sup> For this reason, if not for others, Davidson’s truth semantics has an important corrective function to play, although I would still emphasize the non-exclusive privilege with which ‘the external world’ takes up a place in any language.<sup>121</sup> Owing to the tripartite differentiation of validity criteria in Habermas’ theory of communicative action, we can appreciate this point, while allowing other principles of interpretation – and communicative agree-

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**119** This can be seen as a variation of the Brains-in-a-vat example, which, according to Putnam’s argument, doesn’t allow for the supposition that we could, in fact, be brains in a vat, cf. Putnam 1981, 3 ff; 217–218.

**120** Whereas Rorty speaks of ‘logical space’, Winch speaks ‘logical consistency’, but as far as I can tell it amounts to pretty much the same. Insofar as Rorty, *pace* Habermas, extracts the epistemic value from the principles of communicative justification and exchanges it with non-epistemic usefulness (as bonding, complementing, agreeing on something, and so forth), while at the same time speaking in a language that allows the state of things (social attitudes, logical spaces, and so forth) to present themselves as unquestionably real, it is almost as if he has adopted the venue of logical empiricism and just turned it into conventionalism.

**121** Habermas also regards the question of truth as basic in the sense that every non-cognitive utterance can be expressed in assertive statements, 1987, 88: “Whatever can be said at all, can also be expressed in assertoric form”, which means that “the normative and expressive contents of experience stemming from the domain in which collective identity is secured by ritual means can be expressed in the form of propositions and stored as *cultural knowledge*”, *ibid.* Although I largely condone this view, I would be reluctant to reduce experiential contents (*Erfahrungsgehalte*) to a cultural knowledge (*Wissen*), for reasons I shall give below.

ment – to take place.<sup>122</sup> The further question, however, is whether or not we are well served by principles of rational validity in order to understand a religious discourse. Are there other possible ways of comprehension which depend neither on 1) objective translatability nor on 2) a *sui generis* notion (in the sense of ‘jumping over the fence’, as it were, in order to be socialized from scratch into a foreign way of life)?

## 4.6 Wittgenstein’s Concept of Perspicuous Representation

Turning finally to Wittgenstein, I shall attempt to drive home my point that there may be such ways of comprehension. My demonstration will restrict itself to approach the problem of understanding (in relation to religion) in a way that does not evolve from a notion of truth, but from what Wittgenstein’s calls a ‘perspicuous representation’.

In notes Wittgenstein wrote to himself upon encountering the views from James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, he framed his disagreement by these initial remarks:

One must start out with error and convert it into truth. That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won’t do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place. To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the path from error to truth (PO, 119).

It is obviously important for Wittgenstein to point out, among other things, that ‘truth’ only assumes its full meaning in a process, not simply by its predicative value. The ‘truth’ itself (as in a statement that claims to be true) is not enough to convince anybody, if it is cut loose from the process that leads to it. Therefore it cannot force its way when some other conviction, the error of which has not yet been realized, is obstructing it. However, in order to realize the error, the source of the error has to be revealed, that is, the process that leads to an erratic opinion – or stance or practice or whatever it is – needs to be laid bare, so that we see it for what it is.<sup>123</sup> Then – and only then – will we be inclined to engage in the process that leads to truth. This means, however, that even if truth is seen as a teleological premise for the process of forming a belief (or simply a proposition), it is part of the functioning of this activity rather than its defining principle. Wittgenstein concedes to this by admitting: “I must plunge into the water of doubt again and again” (ibid.). Philosophical reflection is a process with no secure foothold. A theory of truth discloses the wish to get such a foothold by means of reflecting on the premises of statements and facts. But how is the theoretically obtained concept of truth supposed to transmit to the second-order

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<sup>122</sup> Habermas thus confesses to a pragmatic point of view from which the meaning of truth pertains to a certain class of speech acts, 1973, 212.

<sup>123</sup> Thus far, Davidson (2004, 145) seems to be in agreement with Wittgenstein.

thinking *about* truth? The question is, of course, whether Tarski's theorem has solved this problem, or whether it just leads into a *regressus ad infinitum*? Be that as it may, in his remarks on Frazer, Wittgenstein abstains from his earlier attempts to treat such questions from a logical point of view and instead reflects on the pragmatic implications in forms of life. Thus, in the remarks that follow he reproaches Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind for being "unsatisfactory: it makes these look like *errors*. Was Augustine in error, then, when he called upon God on every page of the *Confessions*?" (ibid.). Frazer makes a mistake when he interprets magical practices to rest necessarily on mistaken beliefs about nature, i.e., to be a kind of pseudo-science.<sup>124</sup>

In Wittgenstein's view, there is no reason (and no need) to suppose that people engaged in magic should come to regard this practice as a mistake. Indeed, the ritual practice *would* be a mistake if it was merely formed by an opinion, but since "[n]o *opinion* serves as the foundation for a religious symbol" (op.cit. 123), there is no room for error here (op.cit. 121). The same goes for Augustine as well as for "any genuinely religious action of today, for example, a confession of sins" (op.cit. 123).<sup>125</sup> It is worth noting that Wittgenstein is far from speaking about anything like Rorty's 'canonical designators' or 'logical spaces' in this respect. The faith in God, or the attention to ritual acts, does neither need an authority in Rorty's and Brandom's sense, nor a coherent world view, nor the realization of its own advantageousness, for the very reason that it is not an opinion, let alone a theory.<sup>126</sup> It is something much more fundamental, and "magic is always based on the idea of symbolism and language" (op.cit. 125). In fact, "[a]n entire mythology is stored within our language" (op.cit. 133), Wittgenstein says.

Instead of trying to work out the logical order (in accordance with a truth table) underlying the possible meanings of sentences, as he did in the *Tractatus*, he has now

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**124** In the PO-publication of Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer (PO, 119–155), Wittgenstein may seem to outright deny the relevance of causal explanations in relation to magical practices. In a lecture on Frazer (May 5th 1933), however, he speaks more cautiously: "I say: Only in some cases do they thus entertain a false scientific belief./ It *may* be that it expresses your wish to hurt./ Or it *may* be not even this: It may be that you have an impulse to do it, as when in anger you hit a table, which doesn't mean that you believe you hurt it, nor need it be a survival from prehuman ancestors./ Hitting has many sides", Citron, Rogers, Stern (forthcoming).

**125** Thus, I think Thomas D. Carroll is right to point out the likely influence from Kierkegaard and Lessing with regard to Wittgenstein's understanding of religious belief as needing "an entirely different kind of ground" (2014, 19) than a criterion of 'evidence', which would falsely construe it as a kind of hypothesis.

**126** Although Terry F. Godlove, who employs the semantic holism of Davidson in this respect, also holds, against Frazer (1989, 101), that we are unable to understand magic if we regard the views of those who practice it (and believe in it) to be generally false, he nevertheless finds it obvious that "religious discourse is highly theoretical" (op.cit. 106), and he repeats this claim throughout the subsequent analysis of religious discourse.

directed his attention towards the ways in which language is actually used according to a form of life. The point is no longer whether or not it is meaningful to speak about God or sin, but what this practice can actually tell us about the use of language. And part of what it tells us is that words, such as names and concepts, are used in more than one way. “Why shouldn’t it be possible for a person to regard his name as sacred? It is certainly, on the one hand, the most important instrument which is given to him, and, on the other, like a piece of jewelry hung around his neck at birth” (op.cit. 126 f; cf. chapter 5). Apart from the obvious advantage of calling persons by names in order to address them or refer to them, names can also be associated with another kind of value, namely, what we might prefer to call a symbolic meaning, and here we get close to the use of words in mythology. More importantly, this is not a use which is restricted to a primitive or alternative way of thinking. We find it among ourselves in various ways of using language as, for instance, in metaphysics (op.cit. 116).

Speaking of magical practices, Wittgenstein states that “the principle according to which these practices are arranged is a much more general one than in Frazer’s explanation and it is present in our own minds, so that we ourselves could think up all the possibilities” (op.cit. 127). What appeals to Wittgenstein’s philosophical sentience is the *impression* of magic practices rather than the hypothetical explanation, Frazer offers for them. The way in which fire is used in the recurring fire festivals reveals a relationship with the sun as the source of fire, warmth and growth, as well as its scorching and destructing effects, a relationship to which we have an immediate access ourselves. An important passage sounds:

I don’t mean that just *fire* must make an impression on everyone. Fire no more than any other phenomenon is in itself particularly mysterious, but any of them can become so to us, and the characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that a phenomenon comes to have meaning for him (op.cit. 129).

Any phenomenon, the ordinary sense of which is given by its trivial or referential use, may under certain circumstances suddenly become mysterious, or uncanny, to any of us, irrespective of historical or cultural differences.<sup>127</sup> Thus, Wittgenstein disdained Ernest Renan’s claim that, at some point in the past, primitive man *began* to speculate about the nature of events like ‘birth’, ‘sickness’, ‘death’, ‘sleep’, and ‘dreams’. In Wittgenstein’s eyes Renan’s reference to some evolutionary causality was completely off the mark. Owing to the daily occurrence of these natural events, he finds it inconceivable that a *certain stage* in evolution should have compelled man to wonder about them. The fact that such events might now and again strike us as strange and thus be the cause of wonder or marvel (*Staunen*) is a completely different matter. To regard the forms, in which such marvel is expressed, as primitive, irrespective of their frequent occurrence in ancient myths and rituals, is itself a primitive gesture, on Renan’s part.

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<sup>127</sup> See Cavell (1988, 153 ff) for philosophical reflections on the ‘uncanny’.

His naivety is to believe that “scientific explanation is able to dissolve the wonder” (Wittgenstein, KB, 2011, 38, my translation). The point of interest for philosophy, as Wittgenstein sees it, is not how we humans may explain our historical development as a species, but how we may at any time understand ourselves, including our urge for historical or causal explanations. Our inclination towards a scientific and theoretical understanding may in some respects put our urges and wonderings to sleep (ibid.). Science, therefore, plays its part in emptying the meaning potentials of words (supported by Weber’s famous thesis about the demystification of the world). The question is whether a semantic theory of truth pulls in the same direction?

Wittgenstein’s point is that an explanation of primitive beliefs, or, in general, an explanation of *how* something comes to have meaning in the first place, is misguided. “I believe that the attempt to explain is already therefore wrong, because one must only correctly piece together what one *knows*, without adding anything, and the satisfaction being sought through the explanation follows of itself” (PO, 121). What Wittgenstein suggests should replace the efforts to explain is what he calls a ‘perspicuous representation’ (op.cit. 133). Instead of adding new knowledge to our understanding of something as, for instance, our impression of a magic custom, a perspicuous representation consists in connecting this object of impression with other similar objects, thus creating links (*Zwischenglieder*) between the phenomena. What we get from this overview is not an explanation of our human dispositions to do this or that, but an immediate description of our form of life. The scientific dissatisfaction with this level of representation forgets that it is already itself part of the same form of life and should (also) be seen in light of this.

One of the other issues Wittgenstein grappled with at the time, when he wrote the remarks on Frazer, was how to distinguish between various dimensions of language (as, for instance, between propositions and grammar), and this conundrum followed him deep into the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he engages in a lengthy discussion with (himself as) an imaginary interlocutor about the use and meaning of words. “A main source of our failure to understand is that we don’t have an overview of the use of our words. – Our grammar is deficient in surveyability [...] Hence the importance of finding and creating *intermediate links*” (PI, § 121).<sup>128</sup> This doesn’t mean that philosophy should interfere with the actual use of language (§ 123) as, for instance, by resolving contradictions (§ 124) or describing a correct use of words (§ 130), but rather describe the way in which we follow the rules of language as well as how we might get entangled in them. Actually, “[t]his entanglement in our rules is what we want to

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**128** It is important to note, as Puhl has done in an excellent article on ‘perspicuous representation’ (2006, 30, n.6), that the translation of ‘(übersichtliche) *Darstellung*’ as a *representation* is flawed in the sense that Wittgenstein does not intend to evoke (i.e., *re-present*) something which is already self-identically present, but rather points to something that emerges *from* the comparative view. In this sense his concept of *Darstellung* is comparable to Walter Benjamin’s (cf. the next chapter of this book).



understand: that is, to survey” (§ 125). What Wittgenstein wants, instead of disclosing the basic conditions of meaning and interpretation, is

to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order. For this purpose we shall again and again emphasize distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook [...] The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work. (§ 132)

Though I admit that Rorty might regard a passage like this to be in agreement with his own view, I find it important that Wittgenstein focuses on the ‘idling of language’ rather than orders of ‘logical spaces’. In myths and ritual practices we may find much of this ‘idling’ which is, however, completely ‘meaningful’ in its own context. The point is that it is embedded in a form of life where the meaning of the acts is not dependent on anything other than the practice itself. Inasmuch as ‘the human mind is awakened’ in the process, as it were (cf. PO, 129; KB § 59), we can say that something comes to have meaning. And by effect of this, it contributes to the survey of actual uses of acts, gestures, and language. In other respects, however, the same use may be idle and the error behind it disclosed. There is no *one* rule.

What Wittgenstein aims to bring out by speaking of language games is not that there are rules for the correct way of playing them, but that they may remind us of what we already do. They therefore stand: “as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language” (§ 130). By *making* connections between various uses of language in a comprehensible survey, we are already in the process of interpretation, that is, in a game of language which helps us appreciate the process in which something – a word, a sentence, or an act – comes to have meaning. And “since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain” (§125). I would want to phrase it thus that any theory of meaning is already part of the language it wishes to explain and therefore, strictly speaking, unable to explain it. Likewise, it is not the case that “if philosophy speaks of the use of the word ‘philosophy’, there must be a second-order philosophy”, as Wittgenstein says (§ 121). By carrying out a philosophical investigation Wittgenstein wishes to look just as much on the implicit premise of this undertaking as on the ‘external’ kind of language or practice it is supposed to clarify. Both may form part of a perspicuous representation to the effect of dissolving our bewilderment.

In his comment on a passage from *The Golden Bough* (cf. Frazer, 1993, 617–641), concerning the fire festivals at Beltane, Wittgenstein applies his concept of perspicuous representation by drawing attention to similarities as well as dissimilarities that exist between “all these rites” and compares them, surprisingly at first, with our awareness of “a multiplicity of faces with common features” (PO, 143). This sounds very much to be in line with the concept of family resemblances stated in *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 67), the point being that rituals are not connected by a common substance but by various similarities they also share with other phenomena, including our own (not necessarily religious) experiences. Unsettling as it may be, we may



recognize that our own form of life provides the same possibility of acting as we see in strange people and their customs. As we have pointed out above, Wittgenstein notes that every one of us could, in principle, invent such customs, were it not for their social nature (op.cit. 147). He even suggests that the spirit of a religious festival may be directly reflected in our impression of a man's "tone of voice and facial expression," which makes us understand what "kind of people" it is, "who take part in it [the ritual], their behavior at other times, that is, their character" (op.cit. 145). What Wittgenstein draws to our attention is not that exactly *those* people invented a certain ritual, but that they expressed something in the ritual as well as in their occasional, normal behavior that may strike us as familiar in certain ways. That we can find a person potentially frightening, although he may just have uttered a strict, but rather harmless 'no!', as Wittgenstein puts it, has to do with this person's *expression*. We see the expression just as we 'see' something similar in ourselves. Yet, the object of this *impression* is not some 'inner experience' in any private sense, which would be completely at odds with Wittgenstein's own refutation of the possibility of a private language (cf. PI, § 243–315). Rather, the object, that is, the character, is the expression, and it is reflected in our impression, not as some privately sensible response, but as a socially conditioned recognition. We are social beings and we express ourselves socially. Therefore, such festivals are, in fact, not "made up by one person, so to speak, at random, but rather need an infinitely broader basis if they are to be preserved" (op.cit. 147). This is what perspicuous representations are made of, and they are located 'betwixt and between' two conceptions of meaning, that is, meaning as conditioned by a principle of truth, and meaning as an esoteric 'otherness' demanding a specific insider-view.

It goes without saying that the attempt to solve the intricate issues pertaining to understanding religious utterances and forms of practice demands much more than these Wittgensteinian musings. After all, Wittgenstein was not especially interested in understanding magic beliefs or religious language, but rather in coming to terms with the use of language as such, including the constitution of meaning and the exemplary implications of engaging concepts such as 'pain' and 'knowledge'. Nevertheless, his way of opening our eyes to the practice we are already absorbed in – by asking questions about the nature of truth and meaning, for instance – may also throw an important light on our occupation with – and interpretation of – forms of life we (for whatever reason) define as religious. My main point in this respect is that we may not need the concept of truth as *the* one and only bridge on which to cross over into foreign territories of language use. On the contrary, the truth-condition (as well as any monolithic principle), may blind us to pertinent features of mutual recognition germane to various aspects of our social being. It doesn't change the fact that a recognized connection between language and practice is mandatory for judging something to be meaningful at all. Otherwise, "sounds and actions" would "fall into confusion", as Wittgenstein put it (PI, § 207). As Habermas has pointed out, two human beings who possess the undisturbed skills of communication will have the ability to come

to terms with each other in relation to the physical world irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. And in this case, the principle of truth as a criterion of validity for claiming something in the objective world to be the case is immanently present in the use of words and the commitment to certain beliefs. Yet, this is different from saying that interpretation is bound up with the condition of truth in any imaginable situation. The overall condition of interpretation is not primarily a co-variance (or correspondence) between sentences and states of affairs, however non-referential we may conceive this correspondence to be. Rather, “[s]hared human behavior is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language” (PI, § 206). Religion is a social phenomenon before and beyond its claim to truth.

## 4.7 Varieties of Truth

In his critical essay on Goethe’s novel *Elective Affinities* (*Wahlverwandtschaften*), Walter Benjamin claims that the author struggles against the powers of chaos in his own work (SW, I, 325). The entanglement of poetry and nature, in which he has entrapped himself, leads him towards “the life of the myth, which, without master or boundaries, imposes itself as the sole power in the domain of existence” (op.cit. 316). Benjamin finds evidence for Goethe’s own awareness of an ambiguous attraction to myth in his ambivalent fear of the daemonic.<sup>129</sup> What emerges from this formless existence is “the meaning, fundamental to all knowledge”, Benjamin maintains, “of the relation between myth and truth. This relation is one of mutual exclusion. There is no truth, for there is no unequivocalness – and hence not even error – in myth” (op.cit. 325 f). The concept of truth Benjamin appeals to here parallels that of Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer. Their concepts of myth seem further associable in the sense that they reflect the incongruence between a mythical manifestation of the world and a theoretical notion of external reality.<sup>130</sup> Although this obviously doesn’t pertain to

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**129** In his autobiographical work, Goethe thus speaks of himself as young man who “believed that he perceived something in nature (whether living or lifeless, animate or inanimate) that manifested itself only in contradictions and therefore could not be expressed in any concept, much less in any word. It was not divine, for it seemed irrational; not human, for it had no intelligence; not diabolical, for it was beneficent; and not angelic, for it often betrayed malice. It was like chance, for it lacked continuity, and like Providence, for it suggested context. Everything that limits us seemed penetrable by it, and it appeared to do as it pleased with the elements necessary to our existence, to contract time and expand space. It seemed only to accept the impossible and scornfully to reject the possible. – The essence, which appeared to infiltrate all the others, separating and combining them, I called ‘daemonic’, after the example of the ancients and others who had perceived something similar. *I tried to save myself from this fearful thing*”, cf. Benjamin, SW, I, 316 (my italics).

**130** Although the concepts of myth found in Cassirer and Habermas also fall under this broad characterization, there is one major difference between Benjamin’s and Cassirer’s concept of myth. In the second volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer admits that “[a]t first sight, to be

Goethe, the way in which he subjects his own spirit – and whole existence – to the voice of nature,<sup>131</sup> carries the risk of dissolving the level of critical autonomy in a consuming world of mythical powers,<sup>132</sup> and “no mode of thinking is more disastrous than that which bewilderingly bends back into the myth the very thing that has begun to grow out of it” (op.cit. 326).<sup>133</sup> Benjamin’s point is, in this respect, not to announce the universal prerogative of enlightenment reason. (And neither was this the point of Wittgenstein’s notion of the interrelatedness of truth and error). However, Goethe’s reflective recourse to an abyss of ambiguity unveils a sacrifice of logos rather than an uncontaminated adaption of mythos. In other words, a concept of truth, which is committed to a principle of non-contradiction, cannot return to a paradisiac state of pure being. Benjamin therefore commits himself to philosophy as providing a conceptual differentiation between truth and semblance (*Schein*). At the same time, however, he recognizes the fallen state which necessitates this view (cf. the next chapter of this book). Although truth may no longer find its rest in art as pure form or semblance, truth should not, however, be conflated with knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). “Knowledge and truth are never identical; there is no true knowledge and no known truth” (SW, I, 279). Knowledge is derived from a premise which may or may not be claimed to be true. Rather, “Truth is the quintessence of [all concrete] knowings as symbol” (op.cit. 278). It is this symbolic nature of truth, interrelated with the thought of totality, which makes works of art “the proper site of truths” (ibid.). Yet it becomes the task for philosophy to keep each of these truths from disappearing into the pure beauty of the artistic site. Whatever one might think of this aestheticization of truth,<sup>134</sup> the crucial

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sure, nothing seems more disparate than truth and mythology” (1955, 4), but he then goes on to cite Schelling’s philosophy of mythology, in which we find an early ‘principle of charity’ oriented towards a kind of symbolism which may only appear meaningless and unreasonable on the grounds of our own presupposed standards. Clearly, Cassirer aims to show that mythical thinking is just as form-giving as any other world-projecting activity of the human spirit. Consequently, he allows for a concept of truth which is in line with the premises of mythical thought.

**131** As Goethe writes in old age “She [Nature] has brought me here; she will lead me away. I trust myself to her. She may do as she wants with me [...] It is not I who has spoken of her. No, what is true and what is false – all this she has spoken. Hers is the blame, hers the glory”, cf. Benjamin, SW, I, 315 f.

**132** An obvious resemblance to this line of thought is found in Adorno’s interpretation (1969) of Odysseus as a figure who in order to gain the ‘enlightened’ autonomy of his own self must fight against the consuming powers of myth during his *nostos* (home-journey) to Ithaca.

**133** Similarly Cassirer regards the history of philosophy as a scientific discipline which “may be regarded as a single continuous struggle to effect a separation and liberation from myth”, 1955, xiii.

**134** We may remind ourselves, in this respect, of the concept of truth conceived by Aristotle: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true”, *Metaphysics* 1011b25; likewise *Categories* 12b11, 14b14 and *De Interpretatione*, 16a10. Yet, one may also bear in mind Heidegger’s point that for Aristotle *aesthesis* (sensation) is, in fact, “always true” (ἀεὶ ἀληθής, *De Anima* 3.3.428b21, cf. Heidegger, (2011, GA 62, 378), so that it is exactly not the realm of true judgments (*Geltungsbereich der ‘wahren Urteile’*) which determines ‘how a being is true’ (cf. ὅν ὡς ἀληθής), but the being in itself, namely, in the how (ὡς) of its being

point in our immediate context is Benjamin's claim that the relation between myth and truth is "one of mutual exclusion" (op.cit.). If 'truth', in this respect, involves a principle of non-contradiction, it implies that myth is ignorant of such. But how evident is this? At least, we need to specify what is meant by 'contradiction'.

The French Historian of religion Marcel Detienne must be considered for having offered a probable resolution to this demand by means of his distinction between 'complementary contraries' characterizing a logic of ambiguity and 'contrasting contraries' characterizing a logic of contradiction (1996, 119). Thus, his study, which intriguingly investigates the changes of meaning in the Greek concept of truth, ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*), takes its point of departure in the "system of religious representation"<sup>135</sup>, in which "there is no *Alētheia* without its complementary relationship with *Lēthe*" (op.cit. 69). Although *alētheia* is verbally constructed as a negation of *lēthe* (which means 'oblivion'), it is mythically related to it in a manner of completion rather than contradiction. Conceived within the structuralist scheme of opposites that informs the perspective of Detienne's investigation, it means that "*Alētheia* (+) does not stand on one side, and *Lēthe* (-) on the other. Rather, an intermediate zone develops between the poles, in which *Alētheia* approaches *Lēthe* and vice versa. 'Negativity' is not isolated from Being. It borders the truth and forms its inseparable shadow" (op.cit. 82). In order to avoid confusion, Detienne contrasts this *alētheia*-concept of truth with 'truth' as defined by a 'scientific civilization', namely: "as conformity with logical principles and conformity with reality".<sup>136</sup> Such a distinction is the object of philosophical controversies,<sup>137</sup> but

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*there* (Dasein) as unveiled (unverhülltes)", op.cit. 380. Thus, in Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, ἀλήθεια belongs to the way in which Being shows itself as a condition of possibility for anything to be expressed (λέγεται) *as-something*, GA 62, 379; SuZ, § 7b. He realized, however, that Aristotle subsequently loses his initial concept of truth and being in his predicative (categorical) determination of λόγος ἀποφάνσις the truth of which is judged by the principle of likeness (ὁμοίωσις, 2004, 232, cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 4.4.1027b) as in the thomistic *adaequatio intellectus et rei*.

**135** Detienne subscribes to a notion of religion pretty much like the one adopted in the present work, cf. 1996, 39 ff.

**136** Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25 (as mentioned above) is often cited as a background for this principle.

**137** Cf. Winch who (against the view of Evans-Pritchard who in this respect resembles the view of Detienne) urges that "[r]eality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has", 1999, 346. The classical, though perhaps less sophisticated example, is the cultural relativism voiced by Whorf, 1956, 55. Cf. also William James (1958, 324) and Nelson Goodman's concept of 'worldmaking' (1978, passim.), the latter of which is directly inspired by Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms (claimed to be engendered from a *universal* spontaneity of human imagination, Cassirer, 1955, 29). Contrary to this view, Terry F. Godlove, who has tried to amalgamate Kantian transcendentalism and Davidsonian holism, criticizes what he regards to be relativistic consequences of the 'framework model' (held to comprise views propounded by Peter Berger, T.M.S. Evens, Clifford Geertz, Basil Mitchell, Ninian Smart, Peter Winch, 1989, 78, but likely to include Cassirer and Goodman as well). Inasmuch as this model, according to Godlove, holds that religious narratives "function epistemically as noetic grids of points of view through which the believer

that's not the point here. What is significant for our present concern is rather the way in which the predominant aspect of 'remembrance' – by which *alētheia* stands in opposition to *lēthe* – becomes detached from the divine character of memory (*Mnemosyne*), as laid out by Detienne (op.cit. 109 ff; 120–22). Part of the story is that the professional practice of poetic recitation, by which the rhapsodes competed for the victorious diadem of ivy, came to define poetic art as a "work of illusion (*apatē*)" (op.cit. 111). The act of remembrance no longer obeyed criteria of '*alētheia*' in the sense of representing the past by invoking the Muses (Il.2.484 ff; Hes.Th. 28; cf. Detienne, op.cit. 39 ff). The 'secularized' notion of remembrance pertained instead to criteria of reproducing the oral tradition as accurately and encompassing as possible. Although the opposition between truth and illusion (*alētheia* and *apatē*) did not reach a state of mutual exclusion in the poetic tradition, new principles of reliable remembrance were introduced,<sup>138</sup> which, in the long run, exchanged the religious adherence to the efficacious use of words with commitment to a principle of contradiction (op.cit. 129 ff).<sup>139</sup> Thus myth was substituted by logos to the extent that the ambiguity of meaning yielded to a rule of unequivocalness. I am not comfortable with this part of Detienne's thesis for reasons that I cannot pursue here, but what matters in the present context is merely that we can "detect an inevitable link between the secularization of memory and the decline of *Alētheia*" (op.cit. 111), implying that the complementary – or mutually dependent – oppositions between Remembrance and Oblivion, mythically as well as ritually recognizable in the twin rivers of *Mnemosyne* and *Lethe* (op.cit. 122 f), vanishes in favor of new criteria of truth. Hence in the philosophico-religious sects, when *alētheia* comes to denote 'the Immutable, Being, Memory', on the one hand, and *lēthe* comes to be sided with 'Fluidity, Non-Being, Oblivion', on the other, the "division between the two was clear-cut", the result being that "[t]he spiritual universe of the philosophicoreligious

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cognizes and come to grips with the world" (op.cit. 134), it violates the semantic principle, pointed out by Davidson, that different systems of belief have to largely agree in their utterances about the world in order for conceptual differences to make sense in the first place. Without denying the force of Davidson's refutation of scheme-content dualism, I am reluctant to buy into its anti-pragmatic gist and I prefer to opt, along with White (1971, 108 f), for the more pragmatic concept of *facts* as reality building. Be that as it may, Detienne's concept of truth 'according to scientific civilization' seems to be more in line with a correspondence theory of truth (erratically ascribed to Aristotle, as Heidegger has pointed out, SuZ § 7b), which is, however, regarded as naïve by most philosophers outside of the positivist camp.

**138** One may, for obvious reasons, refer to 'the investigations' – '*historiōn*' – by Herodotus as well as to the juridical function of testimony observed in the Assembly, cf. G.E.R. Lloyd, 1990, 59.

**139** It is worth noticing, in this respect, that the "level of reality that *Alētheia* now symbolized was not simply defined by the religious qualities of a type of man from which it seemed indissociable", 1996, 129. Although this is undoubtedly true, the aging Plato, not to speak of his pseud-epigraphic status in the later academy, still seemed to obtain something of 'the religious qualities' ascribed to the old figures of the poet, the diviner, and the sage.

sects was a split world in which ambiguity had given way to contradiction” (op.cit. 125). Importantly, “the meaning of *Alētheia* changes” (op.cit. 129) entailing that:

It still symbolized a level of reality, but that level took the form of an intemporal reality, identified with stable and immutable Being to the extent that *Alētheia* was radically opposed to the level of reality associated with Time, Death, and *Lēthe* (ibid.).<sup>140</sup>

Unfortunately, Detienne conflates word and concept by stating simultaneously that “we are entering a new system of thought, different because ambiguity is no longer an aspect of *Alētheia*. At this level of reality there is, in a sense, no room for *Alētheia*” (op.cit. 119). What seems to be at stake, more precisely, is that *one concept of truth gives way to another*.

The form of truth, springing from the pre-dialectic *alētheia*, is intimately associated with *dikē* (justice), *peithō* (persuasion) and *mnemosyne* (remembrance), as Detienne has convincingly shown (op.cit. 69 ff). Rather than mere *concepts* in our sense of the term, these are all divinities – or divine *names* – who force themselves upon a person (singer, diviner, sage) elected as a vehicle for their revelation. Although Hesiod already made an explicit distinction between true (*alēthēs*) and false (*pseudes*) at the brink of the 7th Century BCE (Theogony (Th.) 27; Opera et Dies (Op.) 78, cf. Th. 890), he still announced himself as a communicator of divine truth (Th. 28–30; Op.10, 106–7). Concerning the art of poetic representation, there were no *external criteria* for judging between truth and error, so in effect, there was no way of obtaining truth other than through divine inspiration.

Parmenides of the 6th Century seemed to represent the same principle inasmuch as he explicitly received *alētheia* from the mouth of the goddess (fr. 1.29, 288 KRS). However, the goddess also required of him to prepare himself for truth by *following the road of ‘right’* (ῥέμυς) and ‘justice’ (δίκη) (1.28). He was already a ‘*knowing*’ (εἰδοτα) man (1.3), and as he thus proclaimed to know the way to truth,<sup>141</sup> he was accordingly able to point out the road of error and illusion, a path that reverses (cf. *παλίντροπος*, fr. 6.9, 293 KRS) the knowledge of being (e.g., that *which is* excludes that *which is not*, 6.1–2). Thus, there exists a *method* (meaning ‘a road to follow’ in Greek: *μεθόδος*) of gaining truth as well as a method, though erratic, of contradicting it. In other words: the self-inclosing concept of inerrant truth is dissolved; *myth is transcended*. The

<sup>140</sup> Unfortunately, Detienne conflates word and concept by stating simultaneously that “we are entering a new system of thought, different because ambiguity is no longer an aspect of *Alētheia*. At this level of reality there is, in a sense, no room for *Alētheia*”, op.cit. 119. What seems to be at stake is, more precisely, that *one concept of truth gives way to another*.

<sup>141</sup> The path is poetically described as a daemonic road (*daemonos odos*, 1.2–3 KRS) towards the doors of day and night, intimating a realm of pure being beyond opposites, and it is, of course, the concept of pure being (cf. *esti*) that makes up the center of a ‘well-rounded’ truth imparted to him by the goddess.



goddess of truth changes into a power of the argument.<sup>142</sup> And this exactly becomes the predominant discursive principle in the development of dialectics in the 5th Century BCE. *Alētheia* no longer reveals itself from the depth of a mythical world, but is methodically *gained* by the power of *nous* and *logos*. Remembrance is no longer an inspired *reception* of the past, belonging to a world expressed in divine names, but an *active recollection* of justifiable facts. Thus, if we stick to speaking about *truth* in both of these contexts, we will either have to qualify the exact use of the *word*, or differentiate between various *concepts*. Truth is not simply truth.<sup>143</sup>

As Roy Rappaport expresses it, what is ‘true’ in a mythical and ritual context does not apply to contingent matters or rectifiable statements, but rather to the universal and divine nature of things. “Ultimate Sacred Postulates”, he says, “designate the ‘Truth of Things’, the absolute truth of that which simply is, [rather] than it does the ‘truth of thought’ or of expressions” (1999, 294, curiously similar to Heidegger’s notion of truth as undisguised Being, cf. below 5.8). However, this distinction between *verity*, on the one hand, and *veracity* as a property of utterances, on the other, which Rappaport brings to bear on the difference (ibid.), is only one aspect of the matter. More precisely, a concept of truth which implies acceptance “beyond question” (op.cit. 295) pertains to the form as well as to the content of an utterance which is communicated on the premise of this principle. My point is that this is exactly what makes the utterance part of a *religious* discourse. Contrary to the external criteria that make people agree on the truth of facts, the kind of truth which is predicated of the divine is built into a symbolic system without alternative (op.cit. 296). Hence Rappaport refers to the meaning of ‘divine truth’ in relation to a ritual practice where ‘error’ or ‘falsity’ is clearly irrelevant (1999, 297–312; 344–46), and he translates the Nahuatl concept of *Nelli* as ‘the absolute and eternal truth of things’ (op.cit., cf. Leon-Portilla 1963, 73), which makes a given implication of ‘falsehood’, imposed by *our* concept of truth, non-existent.<sup>144</sup> The question is, therefore, what we are to understand by ‘truth’ in

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**142** Persuasion (*Peithō*) still pertains to Truth (*Alētheia*) for Parmenides inasmuch as she follows the same path (κέλευθος, fr.2.4 KRS). However, a *path* is exactly different from a *mere* state of frenzy (*mania*), in which the *peithō* of truth follows from its ecstatic (or inspired) reception.

**143** This is, in fact, also the point Heidegger makes against Aristotle, when the latter turns from ἀλήθεια in sensation (αἴσθησις) to ἀλήθεια according to likeness (ὁμοίωσις), 2004, 323.

**144** Rappaport also offers another example taken from the Sioux people. Thus, when the famous Black Elk passes around the calumet-pipe in honor of Wakan-Tanaka (the Great Holiness that encompasses all things), he identifies the pipe with the divine totality by way of praise: “O Wakan-Tanaka, you are the Truth. The two-legged people who put their mouths to this pipe will become the truth itself”, cf. Rappaport, 1999, 299. Although it seems clear that ‘truth’ in this respect is nothing but the divine reality summoned by smoking the pipe and is therefore beyond any intrinsic possibility of falsehood, one may be struck by the accompanying admonition addressed to the pipe-smoker: “And since you are about to put this pipe to your mouth, you should tell us nothing but the truth. The pipe is *Wakan* and knows all things, you cannot fool it. If you lie, *Wakinyau-Tanka*, who guards the pipe, will punish you!” op.cit. 300. Thus it seems, after all, that truth is *not without alternative*, that a lie

this respect? Habermas would undoubtedly say that the exact concepts of truth differ according to their respective worldviews, but that the very idea of truth is the same (cf. 1984, 58). I find this claim to be question-begging. Although it might be reasonable to suggest that all linguistic cultures must share criteria sufficient for coming to agreement about ostension (implying a culturally independent nature), it doesn't entail that the foreign concept we translate as truth even pertains to this. The question is, on the one hand, whether or not we are allowed to suggest the presence of ideas which are not expressed linguistically (Habermas should not think so according to his own principles), and, on the other hand, which of the crisscrossing elements between concepts that make us decide on a translation. The bottom-line is, however, that if a *worldmaking* myth does not distinguish between nature and culture (inasmuch as it doesn't recognize an independent principle of external reality), as Habermas himself has pointed out, I am not sure what this 'idea of truth' is supposed to mean, or how it can help us understanding the various uses of *concepts*.

Davidson opposed cultural relativism by undermining what he called a scheme-content dualism, his main argument being that if the way in which we conceive of a given content depends entirely on the scheme deployed to express it, we would not possess the means of knowing whether we spoke about the same thing at all (1984, 188 ff). Indeed the argument is a sound one. The question is whether his alternative also is. "[I]t seems unlikely", Davidson writes, "that we can intelligibly attribute [propositional] attitudes as complex as [belief, desire, and intention] to a speaker unless we can translate his words into ours" (op.cit. 186). This skepticism seems fair enough, of course, but the question is what it takes to translate words into other words in the first place. As we have seen, Davidson explicitly regards 'truth' in terms of a propositional convention (op.cit. 188), which, in this case, implies that it is the empirical coincidence of truth claims – between different natural languages, for instance – that makes up the criterion of translation. And therefore "the general requirement on a theory of interpretation is that it can be supported or verified by evidence plausibly available to an interpreter" (op.cit. 128). Since there is no available content, or world-surroundings, independent of the language used by the interpreter, the verification has to be one "of particular interpretations *recognized* as correct" (ibid., my emphasis). The radicalness of this criterion of interpretation, which is at the same stroke a

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*can actually* be told even in the process of summoning the Highest Being – or the totality of all things. The utterance has an obvious parallel in the second song of the Homeric *Iliad*, where the I of the singer appeals to the Muses for inspiration since they *know everything* in contrast to his own insecure opinion of things (Il.2.484). We must ask ourselves, however, if the possibility of error, or even a lie, is of anything but rhetorical significance in this respect (yet implied conceptually in the meaning of 'truth'). Since there is no 'method' – no Parmendean path – for controlling the truth other than its divine repetition, there is no real method for divulging any error (other than by a divine postulate) either. Therefore, Rappaport is right in saying that "[s]moking the calumet certifies the truth of the smoker's testimony" (ibid.), and that's all there is to it.



criterion of translation, is that it stakes everything on tracking a universal semantic truth-condition (convention T) that applies to all possible utterances produced by natural languages (*ibid.*). However, this theoretical (or rather: pre-theoretical) decision is susceptible to the same critique as directed against Habermas' vaguer notion of an *idea* of truth.

Walter Benjamin's philosophical aesthetics houses a view on truth and translation that differs completely from Davidson's semantic theory. Although, Benjamin, as we have just seen, speaks of truth as a way of making conceptual distinctions contrary to that of myth, he doesn't generally regard truth as a result of cognition, but rather as something contained in the form of its own 'representation' (*Darstellung*, 1978, 12). The distinction between 'Being' (*Sein*) and 'Semblance' (*Schein*) pertaining to this form is what makes modern art capable of expressing something true. Thus, 'truth' in Benjamin's terms, does not implicate a predicate accorded to something that can be correlated with something else (cf. the standard *adaequatio*-understanding of truth) as much as it pertains to that *which is immediately expressed* in language.<sup>145</sup> Since, there is no word-to-word possibility of translation in this respect, "the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them" (SW, I, 254). But how does this differ from pure mysticism? If there is no other criterion of truth than pure expression, or, 'what is meant', as Benjamin also phrases it (*op.cit.* 257), how can we avoid arbitrariness? How can we eschew myth, including the modern myth of 'incommensurability' or the privilege of subjective consciousness? Benjamin's answer seems quite simple. By drawing a distinction between "what is meant and the way of meaning it" in respect of the utterance's 'intention', he points out that although the same 'is meant' by *Brot* and *pain* (in German and French), 'the way of meaning' differs (*ibid.*). The word *Brot* doesn't mean the same to a German as the word *pain* does to a Frenchman, but "[e]ven though the way of meaning in these two words is in such conflict, it supplements itself in each of the two languages from which the words are derived" (*ibid.*). In fact, Benjamin seems to hit a note in absolute agreement with Davidson's semantic holism, when he concludes that "what is meant is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences" (*ibid.*), but the following piece of the same paragraph nevertheless illuminates the difference. Instead of confining the intention, or 'what is meant', to truth-conditional principles of belief in Davidson's sense, he derives it from "a constant state of flux – until it is able to emerge as the pure language from the harmony of all

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<sup>145</sup> Speaking about truth in this sense, as he does in his book on the German mourning plays (1978), might seem to lead Benjamin down the same path towards myth as Goethe (and perhaps Heidegger). However, it is clearly Benjamin's intimation that although the symbolic is hinted at in myth, there can be no real distinction there between Being and Semblance. In this respect, Benjamin remains more of a Kantian than Nietzsche and Foucault. In fact, I think that Benjamin's expressive notion of truth is most of all in line with a Spinozist conception of 'affirmative truth', but this is a notion I cannot pursue here.

the various ways of meaning” (ibid.). That ‘meaning’, ‘what is meant’, and ‘intention’ do not point to some mental state behind a given expression, already became clear in an earlier paragraph, where Benjamin writes:

To seek the essence of [...] changes in meaning, in the subjectivity of posterity rather than in the very life of language and its works would mean – even allowing for the crudest psychologism – confusing the root cause of a thing with its essence. (op.cit. 256)

Taking leave of a philosophy of consciousness (and, therefore, also a possible affinity with ‘intentionality’ in Husserl’s sense), Benjamin’s notion of meaning is tied to an *organic* view of language in which changes of meaning occur along the lines of repetition (as, for instance, within the rendition and reception of one and the same literary work during the course of time). Taking this hermeneutical stance, Benjamin does not locate the kinship of languages in the premise of translation understood as an accurate reproduction of an original meaning (op.cit. 255 f), but “only in the totality of their intensions” (op.cit. 257). “Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another” (op.cit. 255). Since the holism of this view transcends any singular premises for measuring translations against one another, the faithful translation can only be conceptually realized in an embryonic form, its fulfilment being a matter of historical revelation (or messianic redemption, cf. Nancy, 2008, 151, see the final chapter of this book). This outlook must be deemed highly unsatisfactory from a theoretical point of view such as Davidson’s, the purpose of which is to point out the external conditions of meaning-making rather than embracing the pragmatic contingency of its empirically unfathomable extensions. In other words: Whereas Benjamin may seem to subscribe to a view of semantic internalism (and the extensional possibilities issuing from it, much in line with Cassirer (1955) in this respect), Davidson conceives language from the point of view of its exact antipode, that is, semantic externalism (and the intentional restrictions confined by it). However, Benjamin leaves room for types of texts whose significance is, in fact, in line with *a calculable translatability* (op.cit. 254). Although he doesn’t offer any examples, we might, on our own account, think of linguistic exactitude pertaining to mathematics, manuals, recipes, prescriptions, maps, etc., as providing a form of communication (about something) that not only requires exact translatability, but restricts its own range of meaning to this very principle. Yet from the point of view of philosophical aesthetics to which Benjamin subscribes this means an impoverishment of the expressive potentials of language, or rather an abstracting ignorance of language (or: *Sprachliche Darstellung*, ‘linguistic representation’) *as unmediated truth*, that is, *as pure language*. The question, of course, is whether the incongruence between the underlying perspectives of Davidson’s and Benjamin’s view on language, truth, and translation, makes this juxtaposition confusing rather than illuminating. The reason why I do not believe the former to be the case is that Benjamin’s reflections on the aesthetic qualities of language opens up for a notion of truth which intuitively seems to be more in line with the religious ‘efficacy of words’ than the externally pre-

mised condition of propositional truth. But, of course, “[t]he same savage, who stabs the picture of his enemy”, as Wittgenstein says, “really builds his hut out of wood and carves his arrow skillfully and not in effigy” (PO, 125). External conditions set certain limits for the ways in which we interact with the world, and language is to a great extent part of this interaction. This is not to say, however, that language cannot be used in other ways. “For what does a literary work ‘say’?” Benjamin asks, “What does it communicate? It ‘tells’ very little to those who understands it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting of information” (op.cit. 253 [sic]). But if Benjamin is right, and if religious language entails some of the same qualities as poetic language,<sup>146</sup> haven’t we, in fact, given in to mysticism or, at least, to elite premises of understanding which are philosophically uninteresting inasmuch as they transcend any conceptual clarification. As I intend to show in the next chapter, this alternative is a false and perhaps conceptually indolent one. It provides the semantic theory of truth-conditional meaning with the immediate advantage of there being no clear-cut way of conceiving a broader, more pragmatic understanding of meaning. But this shouldn’t discourage us, and it goes without saying that the thoughts of Wittgenstein and Benjamin shall inform my attempt to opt for this broader concept.

In respect of the ‘concept of truth’ I have made my case concerning the illusion of translatability inhering in the very use of the concept, i.e., in speaking about *a concept or idea of truth* as if the existence of such needs no further justification. My point is that it is exactly the universalization of truth which stands in severe need of justification. If the interpretation (and translation) of the actual use of religious language resists the claim of an underlying truth-condition being *presupposed*, we will have to look for other ways of understanding, other bridges to cross, as it were. By speaking about the afterlife of literary works, Benjamin wants to direct our attention to language as ‘something living’, the renewal or transformation of which belongs to its very essence (SW, I, 256),<sup>147</sup> that is, the meaning of words, expressions, utterances. The way in which *alētheia* seems to change connotations from Archaic to Classical times, as we have just seen, urges us to follow this line of thought.

## 4.8 Heidegger's Concept of *Alētheia*

Before wrapping up the discussion of criteria of speaking about truth, I shall shortly comment on Heidegger's thought about *Alētheia* (rather coarsely abandoned by

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<sup>146</sup> This is also one of the main ideas in Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy of religion (cf. 1980), as well as the Danish philosopher Johannes Sløk (1981).

<sup>147</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin holds a similar view in his socio-linguistic opposition to the *static* view of language as a system, an outlook which is prominent, for obvious reasons, in the field of *structural* linguistics, 1994, 28; 71.

Detienne for drawing a mystifying and unwarranted conclusion from mere etymology, op.cit. 26 ff). In a paper held in 1930, three years after the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger takes up the specific question about the *essence* of truth (*Das Wesen der Wahrheit*), thereby leaving the contextual deviations of the use of the term aside (concerning practical life-experience, scientific calculus and research, technical know-how, political prudence, artistic form [*Gestaltung*], reflection in thinking [*denkenden Besinnung*] and cultic belief, 2004, 177).<sup>148</sup> Regarding the ordinary meaning of the term ‘truth’, recognizable behind all variations, Heidegger points to the principle of agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) as it is already phrased in ancient Greek philosophy, namely as the ‘accordance’ (ὁμολοῖσις) of a ‘statement’ (λόγος) with ‘a matter’ (πρᾶγμα, op.cit. 182).<sup>149</sup> This definition reappears in Scholastic thought as *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* (op.cit. 180). In fact, the ambiguity of this principle, i.e., that it may express the agreement of knowledge with the thing (state of affairs) as well as the agreement of the thing (state of affairs) with knowledge, has secured its survival from a religious to a secularized, or enlightened, way of conception. Due to the medieval frames of Christian faith, all things created, every state of affairs, represent the *intellectus divinus* to which the human intellect must conform, whereas in Kant, implementing the Copernican revolution, things (*Gegenstände*), or facts of the matter (*Sachen*), can be verified only insofar as they conform to knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) as obtained by the human subject. Yet an unchanged principle of agreement still applies (ibid.). Thus, the essence of truth *seems* to be determined.

That the essence of propositional truth consists in the correctness of the statement is generally recognized. Even where an effort is made — with a noticeable lack of success — to explain how correctness is to occur, it is already presupposed as being the essence of truth.<sup>150</sup>

What arrests Heidegger’s thought in this respect is the presupposition as such. The question, which the conventional understanding of truth (not to say convention T), gives rise to, is how the principle of correctness, or accordance, has become possible in the first place? Heidegger’s answer is that it expresses the freedom of that which

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**148** The main difference from his concept of truth in *SuZ* is that he now turns to Being itself rather than Being viewed through the prism of *Dasein*. Though he still defines truth as ‘unconcealment’ (*Unverborgenheit*), it is shifted from an existential focus to the openness of the world (2004, GA 9, 185–188).

**149** Although Aristotle spoke about truth as the accordance between the existence of a thing and the statement (λόγος) of this existence (*Categories* 14b14–15), he actually regarded words (ὀνόμα) as reflecting likenesses (ὁμοιώματα) between things (πράγματα) and the affections (παθήματα) they cause in the mind (ψυχή), *De Interpretatione*, 16a7–8.

**150** Translation based on John Sallis, 1993. In Heidegger’s own words: “Dass das Wesen der Satz Wahrheit in der Richtigkeit der Aussage besteht, halt man für ausgemacht. Auch dort, wo man sich mit einer merkwürdigen Vergeblichkeit abmüht zu erklären, wie die Richtigkeit zustande kommen soll, setzt man sie schon als das Wesen der Wahrheit voraus”, 2004, 181.

stands out (ek-sists) in the open (2004, 189). It is, in other words, the availability of objective criteria of measurement that constitutes the 'free' principle of truth as correspondence, but that does not account for the condition of possibility of this availability. Instead of seeking it in the human subject (a subject that in a Kantian freedom of judgment recognizes the truth of things), Heidegger refers the very principle of freedom to the ex-isting, dis-closing *Dasein* that directs human cognition to 'beings' (*Seiendes*). Thus:

'Truth' is not the predicate of a correct proposition, asserted of an 'object' by a human 'subject' and then valid in some unknown sphere, but is rather the disclosure of beings through which an openness essences [west]. (op.cit. 190)<sup>151</sup>

This openness and freedom of truth, however, which allows human cognition to make judgments from the point of view of its historical being, is, at the same time, the very condition of *Dasein*. Having thus grounded Truth in Being and Freedom, implying the etymological understanding of *a-lētheia* as un-concealment (*Unverborgenheit*), Heidegger draws the noteworthy conclusion that the historical human being is, at one and the same time, indorsed to make judgments and barred from letting beings be *what and that they are* (op.cit. 191).<sup>152</sup> Semblance becomes part of that which stands out in truth, inasmuch as the essence of truth also implicates a retraction (as in the pulse of Kabbalist thought about creation, cf. Scholem, 1995, 17). The forgetting of this re-concealment is what has happened, for instance, in metaphysics and science, where 'truth' is reduced to 'accordance' (*adaequatio*) (op.cit. 195).

The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible. This persistence has its unwitting support in that *bearing* by which *Dasein* not only *ek-sists* but also at same time *in-sists*, i.e., holds fast to what is offered by beings, as if they were open of and in themselves. (op.cit. 196)<sup>153</sup>

Yet, the independent (empirical) truths of beings (or state of affairs) is but an impoverished reverberation of *the truth of beings as a whole* (*der Wahrheit des Seienden im Ganzen*, op.cit. 199). This truth can only be put into words by a thinking which again

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151 In Heidegger's own words: "Die 'Wahrheit' ist kein Merkmal des richtigen Satzes, der durch ein menschliches 'Subject' von einem 'Object' ausgesagt wird und dann irgendwo, man Weiss nicht in welchem Bereich, 'gilt' sondern die Wahrheit ist die Entbergung des Seienden, durch die eine Offenheit west!"

152 The same point, most probably inspired by Heidegger, is found in Foucault, 1970, 371 f.

153 Translation taken from John Sallis, 1993. In Heidegger's own words: "Die vermessene Vergessenheit des Menschentums beharrt auf der Sicherung seiner selbst durch das ihm jeweils zugängliche Gangbare. Dieses Beharren hat seine ihm selbst unkennbare Stütze im *Verhältnis*, als welches das *Dasein* nicht nur *ek-sistiert*, sondern zugleich *in-sistiert*, d.h., sich vertiefend auf dem besteht, was das wie von selbst und an sich offene Seiende bietet".

takes up the question of Being, not by expressing an opinion about it, but by letting it speak for itself (ibid.).<sup>154</sup>

A similarity with Benjamin's view of the relation in modern art between semblance and truth is undeniable,<sup>155</sup> as is the thought about a forgetfulness of a truth which speaks, not from predicative judgments, but from the self-revelation of the world in *pure language*. However, Heidegger's reference to a phenomenology of Being as a history-grounding liberation of humanity to the ek-sistence of authentic *Dasein*, struck Benjamin as contemptibly ignoring the consequences of actual history and leaving the gift of Being merely to the victors. Though the late Heidegger's responsive openness to 'a coming God', and his statement that 'only a God can save us' (1966), may bear a superficial resemblance with Benjamin's messianic eschatology, the gist of the latter is closely associated with the need to redeem the past. Benjamin is certainly not heard in an isolated expectancy for the future. Thus, for Benjamin, 'truth' has in general (that is, in philosophy and art criticism) retained something of the critical value, which, for Heidegger, can only be contingently derived from the way in which beings stand out in their own freedom. Heidegger may seem to be more consequent than Benjamin in that the latter appears to overburden the concept of truth, regarding it as still ensuing from pure language, on the one hand, and as concealing itself behind semblance in modern art, on the other. Yet, whereas Heidegger actually claims to be able to speak positively about truth as that which, albeit only for a passing moment, shows itself in the unconcealment of Being, Benjamin sticks to a regulative notion of truth and is thus less self-contradicting as it might appear at first glance. Truth is always *difference* to what *appears* to be true, for Benjamin.<sup>156</sup> Though,

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**154** However, as Tugendhat has shown in a very thorough exploration of Heidegger's concept of truth from § 44 in SuZ to *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (2004, pp. 177–202), Heidegger stands the risk of straining the concept of truth beyond measure, when he identifies it with 'disclosedness' (*Entdecktheit* and *Erschlossenheit*) before and beyond criteria of propositional truth vs. falsehood (Tugendhat, 1970, 329; referring to 295 f; 333). As I have tried to show above, however, the concept of truth may, from a pragmatic point of view, allow for a semantic stretch that even makes this 'broadening' of the concept conceivable, though, of course, it does, at the same, bring it in a perhaps uncomfortably close contact with a religious use of language.

**155** Heidegger's appreciation of the work of art as a manifestation of Being points in the same direction, although Benjamin's persistence on the critical differentiation between truth and semblance is thought by Heidegger to be secondary to the *true* work of art, as it seems.

**156** It is an open question, whether or not this implicit distinction is, in fact, always present in any communicable use of the concept of truth (yet it is hard, if not impossible, to conceive of a use in which it is not). If this is the case, however, Heidegger's ontological concept of truth may either be pragmatically question-begging or, at best, metaphorical, insofar as this distinction seems to disappear in his attempt to locate apophantic truth in pure disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*), Tugendhat, 1970, 295 ff.; 331–34. It is not that Heidegger ignores the said distinction, though. On the contrary, more than once he starts out by referring to it as, for instance, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, where he states that "Wahr nennen wir aber nicht nur einen Satz, sondern auch eine Sache, wahres Gold im Unterschied zum Scheingold", 1980, 35. Yet, what he wants to point out, eventually, is not what we

Heidegger and Benjamin might concur in regarding this condition as a feature of modernity, Heidegger ascribes to a phenomenology of Being the power of redeeming 'truth' in language, whereas Benjamin seems to make do with the way in which truth is still counter-factually recognizable, albeit in a suppressed form, in spoken language.<sup>157</sup> Though it is not Heidegger but Benjamin, who refers to religious teachings as heralding an unconcealed truth of the world, Heidegger may actually seem to be the more religiously inclined of the two. Rather than expressing the inexpressible by recognizing the untranscendable presence of language, as Wittgenstein and Benjamin are inclined to, Heidegger's thinking looks like an aim to extort the liberating presence of being *by means of language*.

If this latter intention, whether it is fair to attribute it to Heidegger or not, can be seen as an attempt to redeem 'truth' from the strictures of measurement in order to perceive how any measurement may already depend on it, it stands as a *true* grounding of truth. Truth is that, and only that, which does not depend on anything other than itself. Such substantialization of truth, on which everything else depends, calls for a divine name. Heidegger's *Being* is such a name, and the only thing that keeps it from being religious is that it hides, or resists, the implications of being a *proper* name. By giving truth a proper name (or a whole host of proper names, as is the case in polytheism), religions *make something true*, namely, the world which attains its meaning only by being held and framed by those names. There is nothing outside the divine reality itself by which its truth can be measured, but the true *is the divine* as the divine *is the true*. Yet, mythical or cultic representations of this truth *may be viewed* as merely symbolizing its presence. However closely language is believed to represent, or reflect, truth, it might (though not necessarily) be regarded as intrinsically inadequate. As Cassirer sees it, religious language is always less than identical with divine being (1978, II, 239). Even in that case, however, religious language still claims for itself a privileged access to a higher reality in which 'truth' is *subject rather than object or predicate* (as even embodied, for instance, in Jesus represented as saying 'I am the Truth, the Way, and the Life' and Shiva represented (in the *Linga Purana*) as saying 'I am the Truth itself' (cf. Sri G. Ananda, 2013, 16). Truth – in a religious context – is that which speaks of itself. I venture to say that the holism of every mental engagement with the world that represents itself as a coincidence of subject and object (and this *may* pertain to myth as well as to philosophy), has bought into a quintessential aspect of this religious stance. Therefore, Benjamin hasn't. Benja-

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normally mean by 'truth', but rather *how* this conception comes about, or, in other words, what *kind of truth* it takes for propositional truth to be possible in the first place, cf. Tugendhat, op.cit. 336. The question still stands, however, whether or not any intelligible use of the concept of truth is lost in the process, op.cit. 334 f.

<sup>157</sup> As we shall see, the thinking of later Heidegger develops in a direction somewhat comparable with this stance, cf. chapter 6.4–6.5.



min does not speak from the point of view of truth, but from the point of view of its absence. What secures our commitment to truth is therefore not a self-presenting presence, but rather the diagnosis *via negativa* of a luring injustice forming our relationship with the world.

## 5 Of Name and Language

*Sprache, die Mutter der Vernunft und Offenbarung, ihr A und  $\Omega$*

Johan Georg Hamann; Walter Benjamin

*For Benjamin to quote is to name, and naming rather than speaking, the word rather than the sentence, brings truth to light*

Hannah Arendt

### 5.1 Language and Magic

In order to reach an understanding of religion which is not already submitted to the objectifying standards of science, we will have to trace our basic human relationship with the world back into the means for establishing such a relationship. Language is such a means, and regarded in the full range of its implications, language also comprises relationships such as are found in magic. Says Wittgenstein: “In the ancient rites we have the use of an extremely developed gesture-language” (PO, 135). Language and magic are means of communication. Yet, communication is not merely transmission of information. Rather, in its most basic sense, it is a means of communing, as also expressed intrinsically in the German *Mitteilung*, the *sharing* of meaning. Thus the young Walter Benjamin, who struggled to free language from the traditional notion of its representational character, located the origin of language in that which is *communicable* (‘mitteilbar’, 1996, I, 63), rather than in the function of denotation (op.cit. 65). “All language” writes Benjamin:

communicates itself in itself; it is in the purest sense the ‘medium’ of the communication. Mediation, which is the immediacy of all mental communication, is the fundamental problem of linguistic theory, and if one chooses to call this immediacy magic, then the primary problem of language is its magic (SW, I, 64).<sup>158</sup>

Benjamin’s reference to the magic character of language, in unremitting contrast to its semiotic content, is deeply inspired by Kabbalistic mysticism, in which an original language is believed to reflect the power of God’s creation. Thus Benjamin does not speak of magic in the concrete form of ancient rites, but rather as a principle of com-

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<sup>158</sup> I take my point of departure in this chapter from two texts that weren’t even intended for publication by their authors. They disclose pending thoughts, a loose scribbling, from 1916 (Benjamin) and 1931 (Wittgenstein), respectively, and should perhaps not be taken for more than that. However, I think the issues at stake, though far from being identical, point towards a new way of thinking that perhaps hadn’t fully matured in the authors themselves. That we thus have to do with ideas in progress only makes them all the more interesting. My attempt is to borrow from these beginnings in forming my own rethinking of a philosophy of religion.

munication which also grounds the workings of such rites.<sup>159</sup> The same principle is found in language, the magic of which is the immediacy of its relations. That is to say: what language mediates is nothing but language itself. “All language communicates itself” (op.cit. 63). Yet, communication is the transmission of that which is communicable. And that which is communicable is the world. Agreeing with Hamann’s view on language – and the Kabbalist inspiration behind it – Benjamin thus exchanges an instrumentalist view of language with an expressive one, though the expressive force does not stem from the powers of human imagination, but from the occult roots of language itself. It is not the mind or the world that pervades language, but language that pervades mind and world.<sup>160</sup> “The existence of language”, writes Benjamin, “is coextensive not only with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything” (op.cit. 62). These are the relations of language. However, they are not, strictly speaking, relations between words and things, but between the mental entity and its linguistic expression. Thus, “mental being” does not communicate itself *through* language, but *in* language (op.cit. 63). In other words: “that which in a mental entity is communicable is its language” (ibid.). The same magical immediacy pertains to things in themselves; they also communicate to one another through their ‘sharing of matter’<sup>161</sup>, yet the immediate contact between them is deaf and dumb. In contrast, human language establishes a magical community with things, which “is immaterial and purely mental, and the symbol of this is sound” (op.cit. 67). The world of things carried by the sound of the human voice is the world of language, magically summoned by the naming activity of mankind (op.cit. 64). And this, in Benjamin’s eyes, is the primacy – and origin – of language: the construction of an immaterial, and nonsensuous (*unsinnlicher*), order

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**159** As for the relation to magical rites, see Benjamin, SW 2/2, 687 (and commentary by Menninghaus, 1995, 75). Menninghaus also points out (op.cit. 28) that Benjamin’s concept of magic, in the 1916-draft, has a clear connection with early romanticism. However, it does not express the same wonder at the summoning power of words (as, for instance, in the sense of A.W. Schlegel), and it does not embrace the idea of a sympathetic relation between sound and object (as, for instance, in Novalis). Rather, it buys into the mystic quality of the form (as in Hamann, as well as in Schlegel and Novalis), a kind of *grammar* much like the sense in which Wittgenstein uses this term, cf. “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)”, PI § 373. For a relation between this concept of grammar and ritual, see Albinus, forthcoming. Gabrielli should also be mentioned for his very important point of relating Benjamin’s notion of the magic of language to the paradoxical condition of the communicable. As Gabrielli writes: “das Paradox der Sprache besteht darin, dass sie nichts anderes als sich selbst mitteilt und gleichzeitig das Andere – Welt und Denken – ausdrückt” (2004, 247), a paradox which, as Benjamin sees it, expresses the essential character of a magical summoning.

**160** For a nuanced exposition of Benjamin’s reading of Hamann, who is the prime inspiration behind these thoughts, see Menninghaus, 1995, 21–33; 205–215.

**161** In this respect, the German phrase “Sie [Die Dinge] können sich nur durch eine mehr oder minder stoffliche Gemeinschaft einander mitteilen” (GS II.1, p. 147) is difficult to translate without loss of meaning.

of names bestowed on that in which human beings find their home.<sup>162</sup> Still influenced as the young Benjamin was by a Kantian tradition<sup>163</sup> it is not surprising that we are here recalled of the philosophy of symbolic forms according to which Ernst Cassirer develops his notion of myth.<sup>164</sup> Thus, it may be worth our while to take a neo-Kantian detour concerning the concepts of experience and appearance.

## 5.2 Expression in Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*

Cassirer shows himself to be a neo-Kantian by ascribing to the symbolic representation of an object “an independent, spontaneous act of consciousness” (1955, 29; 1946, 8). In other words, humans encounter the world through symbolic forms. For Cassirer, as for Benjamin, one of the basic forms which, at the same time, reveals the nature of language, is the name. By naming things we have originally taken them in possession in language, from whence they glance back at us with meaning. The human mind thus reveals a world-projective spontaneity, the original form of which can be glimpsed in ancient myth. In *Language and Myth* Cassirer writes:

The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name – that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the mythmaking consciousness itself. (1946, 3)

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**162** Benjamin's talk about ‘nonsensuous similarities’ (*unsinnlicher Ähnlichkeiten*) stems from a much later text, *On The doctrine of the Similar*, likewise unpublished in his lifetime. It deals with the fading human capacity for experiencing similarities of a nonsensuous kind: “For clearly the perceptual world [*Merkwelt*] of modern human beings seems to contain far fewer of those magical correspondences than did that of the ancients or even that of primitive peoples”, SW 2/2, 695. In another, similar text, *On the Mimetic Faculty*, he mentions ‘dancing’, whose oldest function is the production of similarities, *ibid.* 720, and refers to the reading from entrails and from the stars along the same lines. For the clear connection between these texts and the early one on the origin of language, see Menninghaus, 1995, 38.

**163** The young Benjamin's neo-Kantian perspective is clear in many instances as also in this text: “The language of this lamp, for example, communicates not the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself) but the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression”, *op.cit.* 63. It is just as clear, however, if not even more, that the Kabbalist interpretation of the fall from a paradisiacal state is the prime inspiration behind Benjamin's tentative notion of human language.

**164** Benjamin comes especially close to Cassirer, whose class he attended in Berlin, when, in his short essay on a ‘coming philosophy’, he speaks about “[t]he task of future epistemology” which “is to find for knowledge the sphere of total neutrality in regard to the concepts of both subject and object; in other words, it is to discover the autonomous, innate sphere of knowledge in which this concept in no way continues to designate the relation between two metaphysical entities”, SW, I, 104. This revision of the possible categories of knowledge may have adopted more than just a touch of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms (compare Cassirer, 1955, 10; 29 f).

For Cassirer, as for Benjamin, language fundamentally serves to open a world rather than to disclose it, that is, it presents it in a narrative of organic powers rather than merely by means of denotation. This idea of language is reflected in the Kabbalist tradition as well as in early Romanticism where it is expressed, for instance, in Herder's notion of the creative power of poetic imagination. Only a little later, Max Müller speculated about the origin of language in similar terms. However, since he was more inclined towards the enlightened attitude of demystification, he rather saw myth as a disease of language which still held its sway over modern minds. Cassirer quotes Müller with some amount of sympathy for holding that "[m]ythology is inevitable, it is natural, it is an inherent necessity of language [...] Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language" (1873, 353–5, cf. Cassirer, *op.cit.* 5).<sup>165</sup> What Cassirer opposes in Müller is the naïve realism that made him reduce the names of mythical figures to a forgotten origin of natural phenomena (1955, 22). Rather than seeing mythical language as covering the origin of an illusion, Cassirer takes it to produce and posit a world of its own by force of an internal dialectics of the spirit (1946, 8).<sup>166</sup> "Thus the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension, and as such is made visible to us" (*ibid.*). Language does not obtain its sense from correspondence with reality, but by creating a reality out of an organic world-relation, that is, by making the world appear in a certain way. Owing to Cassirer's still Kantian orientation, language is, however, but a window to the spiritual power of man, by which he "reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality" (*op.cit.* 10). In myth this revelation takes place as a creative formation of experience through names. In light of this view, in which spiritual spontaneity is regarded as fundamental, it is perhaps a bit surprising that Cassirer turns to the German philologist Hermann Usener who, irrespective of his elaborate and inspiring study of divine names, endorses a basic view of spiritual responsiveness (1929, 291).<sup>167</sup> Instead of endorsing a notion, widespread among philosophers of the Enlightenment, that the human mind is "endowed *ab initio* with logical categories", Cassirer follows Usener in tracing the origin of human thought back through the "actual *history* of language and religion" (1946, 15 f;

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<sup>165</sup> Likewise, in his philosophy of symbolic forms, Cassirer claims that "[t]he question of the origin of language is indissolubly interwoven with that of the origin of myth" (1955, xv), and he mentions Schelling's notion of language as a 'faded mythology', *op.cit.* 21.

<sup>166</sup> It has to be said, though, that Cassirer aims at a philosophical conception of myth, which, on the one hand, distances itself from Schelling's attempt to derive it from the concept of God as a dialectical unity of consciousness, and, on the other, from the empirically informed theories of the human psyche, 1955, 15 f. Instead, he wants to locate it in "a still entirely undifferentiated intuition of magical efficacy" (*op.cit.* 16), somewhat in line with Benjamin.

<sup>167</sup> The passage Cassirer quotes bespeaks a certain "mobility and excitability of the religious sensation" (*beweglichkeit und reizbarkeit der religiösen empfindung*, *op.cit.*; cf. Cassirer, 1946, 18).

21) and ends up with the divine name (1955, 22 f).<sup>168</sup> At this basic level, Usener claims to find linguistic evidence for the belief in 'momentary gods' (*Augenblicksgötter*), who contrary to the differentiated 'special gods' (*Sondergötter*) of a later stage, reflects an instantaneous and fleeting content of the human spirit projected into the natural surroundings (op.cit. 18, cf. Usener, 1929, 111 f; 279 ff).<sup>169</sup> Both Usener and Cassirer seem to understand this experiential flash in light of a dialectics between the impressionable and expressive nature of the human spirit. In Usener we read that

Wenn die augenblickliche empfindung dem Dinge vor uns, das uns die unmittelbare nähe einer Gottheit zu bewusstsein bringt, dem Zustand in dem wir uns befinden, der Kraftwirkung die uns überrascht, den Werth und das Vermögen einer Gottheit zumisst, dann ist der Augenblicksgott empfunden und geschaffen. (1929, 280)

Unexpectedly, Cassirer does not take any pains to extract the implied view of responsiveness from his formalized version of Usener's view. On the contrary: "Every impression that man receives", Cassirer writes, "every wish that stirs in him, every hope that lures him, every danger that threatens him can affect him thus religiously" (op.cit.). Later, when explicating his notion of mythical totality, he finds the thought "captivated and enthralled by the intuition which suddenly confronts it" (op.cit. 32). The lack of general concepts means that "it comes to rest in the immediate experience" (ibid.).<sup>170</sup> No abstraction, no separation between word and content, has yet taken place, and it appears therefore that we have reached a point, prior to the differentiation through which language is known to us, where word and magic meet "in absolute immediacy" (op.cit. 33, cf. Usener, 1929, 280).<sup>171</sup>

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**168** An interesting parallel that I cannot pursue in this context regards the way in which the faculty of reason, defining the dignity of an enlightened humanity, is dissolved by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the blind force of the will (entailing a 'will to truth', as Nietzsche termed it). Thus, in Spengler, for whom 'the will' characterizes the Faustian spirit of Modern man, it cannot be subsumed under a concept: "Will – that is no concept, but a name, a primordial word like God" (*Wille – das ist kein Begriff, sondern eine Name, ein Urwort wie Gott*), 1972, 382.

**169** Usener's refers, among other things, to Mannhardt's classical study of the so-called demons of the grain (*Korndämonen*, cf. Mannhardt 1978), which also caught the attention of Frazer, Cassirer, and, as we shall see below, Wittgenstein. In the ancient agrarian customs of Germany, the first and last cut of the grain, for instance, are used for constructing figures of beneficent deities (*Segensgottheiten*), a fact that, for Usener, testifies to the intimate relation between name and experience, op.cit. As we shall see further on, Heidegger's notion of the innermost relation between handling and understanding, connected with the concept of *Zuhandensein*, may actually point in a similar direction.

**170** Likewise, in his the second volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer claims that human spirit "more and more clearly and consciously confronts the force of the 'impression' with an active force of 'expression'", 1955, 23.

**171** Interestingly, Cassirer writes that: "More and more clearly we see ourselves faced with the question whether the close relationship of contents which certainly obtains between language and myth may not be most readily explained by the common form of their evolution, by the condition [?] which

As a contrast to the premises of rational learning processes, Habermas rephrases Lévi-Strauss' structural characterization of myth in a way that bears a remarkable resemblance with this view:

The magical relation between names and designated objects, the concretistic relation between the meaning of expressions and the states-of-affairs represented give evidence of systematic confusion between *internal connections of meaning and external connections of objects*. (1984, 49 = 1981, I, 81)

Obviously, there is a significant parallel here between Cassirer's and Habermas' view of myth as a semantic totality that is closed off from a theoretical conception of external reality, and although Habermas doesn't share Cassirer's commitment to transcendentalism (2001b, 15 ff), he agrees with his view of scientific learning processes as cognitively superior to mythical thinking.<sup>172</sup> For Cassirer there is in mythical thought a concentration of meaning that preserves intension from dissolving into extension, and quality from being dispersed in quantity (1946, 91). Myth captures the universe in a drop of water, the "part does not merely represent the whole, or the specimen its class; they are identical with the totality to which they belong" (op.cit. 92). The crab has every right to protest (cf. above 2.1.). It is not just a crustacean, it is a single crab and it holds the whole world in its singularity. And this is where myth and magic meet: "Whoever has brought any part of a whole into his power has thereby acquired power, in the magical sense, over the whole itself" (ibid.). Alas, the crab cannot hold on to this whole by itself. As soon as it contains it, it must surrender its own subjectivity to it; it is swallowed once again, not so much by its categorical belonging to the species as by the whole whence its singularity once emerged. The "genuine presence" of the whole in the part, which was a recurrent thought in Romanticism and not to be confused with the conceptual universalization of discursive thought, stems from that which both gives and retracts the unique presence of being, namely the *form* of a mythico-magical response to the world.

Reaching his conclusion (without talking about crabs), Cassirer departs from Max Müller's view of mythical language as a distorted depiction of reality, in favor of a concept of 'mythic metaphor'. Referring to the practice in a Mexican vegetation cult of calling the last grain of corn by the name of the goddess Chicomecoatl, he regards such a use of metaphor (in line with Quintillian) as being one of the essential conditions of human speech (op.cit. 94 f). It has to do with the very act of "verbal *conceiv-*

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govern[?] both verbal expression and mythic imagination from their earliest, unconscious beginnings", op.cit. 56.

**172** Contrary to Cassirer, Habermas does not ignore the price paid for the development of a modern worldview (1981, I, 101), but instead of revoking a mythico-magical state of immediacy, he criticizes the illegitimate monopolization of instrumental reason at the cost of communicative reason, the irreversible development of which is, in his view, our only means of rationally appropriating the semantic resources of past or exotic traditions (op.cit. 102 f).



ing” and “stems ultimately from that same process of concentration, the compression of *given sense experience, which originally initiates every single verbal concept*” (ibid., italics mine). This much Cassirer admits the role of responsiveness in the verbal reflection of human consciousness.

Intriguingly, in Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough* we find a consideration that bears a certain resemblance to Cassirer's, even down to using a similar empirical example, i.e., that which also informed Usener's concept of 'momentary gods'. Regarding the ritual precautions against the 'corn-wolf' in the rural customs of Mecklenbourg (cf. Frazer, 1993, 449), Wittgenstein muses: “When what hides in the last sheaf of corn is called the ‘Corn-wolf’, but also this sheaf itself as well as the man who binds it, we recognize herein a familiar linguistic occurrence [*wohlbekannten sprachlichen Vorgang*]” (PO, 135). The name of the Corn-wolf does not merely denote the last grain, nor a certain property or power specifically contained in it, but it rather verbalizes an experiential content by establishing immediate, pre-categorical relations, and this is familiar to us in our own use of language: “An entire mythology is stored within our language” (op.cit. 133).

There is no short answer as to the extension of what he implies by this well-known statement,<sup>173</sup> but part of it may involve the way in which language objectifies a world of names as being an image of reality.<sup>174</sup> And it is not only invisible entities such as the Corn-wolf which, on account of its name, may wander from the sheaf to the man, who binds it. The same goes for 'love' and 'death' and every other sort of 'quality', the associative or metonymic uses of which is easily recognizable in everyday language, whether by means of metaphor, as Cassirer would say, or simply by means of the use of language, as Wittgenstein would most likely prefer to put it.<sup>175</sup>

A profound difference, however, runs through the apparent convergence between Cassirer and Wittgenstein. It is not that Wittgenstein dismisses the significance of impression and experience. On the contrary, he takes pains to keep the depth of that impression which something like a magical practice makes on us, recognizing that it reflects something we know from our own lives, even something that “stems from an inner experience” (PO, 147). The crucial difference between Wittgenstein and Cassirer on this point rather pertains to the very notion of experience. For Cassirer, and in this respect he is still deeply entrenched in the philosophy of consciousness, an experience is, on the one hand, formed by the spontaneous world-projection of the spirit, but is also, on the other hand, a response to external stimuli which “originally initi-

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**173** Concerning “the movement of language”, the aspect of different uses for the same expression or concept, or uses which glide from one context to another, see Moore's Lectures 3a and 4a, Citron, Rogers & Stern, forthcoming.

**174** His own examples of 'death' and 'beauty' go to show this, ibid.

**175** Wittgenstein denies that religious 'talking' is metaphorical, “for otherwise it would have to be possible to say the same things in prose”, cf. Waismann, 1979, 117. I am not sure, however, that Cassirer would agree to the implicit understanding of 'metaphor' in this statement.

ates every single verbal concept” (op.cit. 95).<sup>176</sup> To understand the origin of language we must understand how the concentration of experience procures a concept, though we remain pretty much in the dark as to how the verbal ‘structure’ actually establishes itself (op.cit. 34–37). In Wittgenstein, and Benjamin, the concept of experience is regarded from the exact opposite end. It is constituted by what is communicable (*mittelbar*), rather than born from some mental process of its own (PI § 363). This implies, for one thing, that impression is not to be seen as some private response, but, in Wittgenstein’s view, as that which reflects our social being in our inner experiences. “A mental image” is not a pre-linguistic phenomenon projected unto a private screen, as it were, but “the image which is described when someone describes what he imagines” (§ 367).<sup>177</sup> In the same way, it is from our experience as social beings that we are normally able to determine without difficulty the state of mind a person is in (PI, II, § 358), not because we have acquired a certain technique of objective denotation (though such is often used in psychology and psychiatry), but rather because we are accustomed to recognize an imponderable evidence (*unwäbare Evidenz*) for it (ibid.), such as tone of voice, facial expression, subtleties of gesture, etc. If this ability merely sprang from subjective impressions, one would expect them to be far more random than they obviously are. Although, they elude exact description, they don’t transcend the matrix, or *magical immediacy*, of social interaction.<sup>178</sup> Even the faintest hint of a smile may immediately call forth a mirror response on another’s face. The impression we get from someone’s expression is but another manifestation of that expression (cf. Wittgenstein PO, 149). My experience springs from the form of life in which it becomes communicable. But that form of life is already entailed in the form of my language. “The *speaking* of language”, as Wittgenstein says, “is part of an activity, or a form of life” (PI, § 23).

### 5.3 Language and Myth in Benjamin

By conjoining the perspectives of Cassirer and Usener (while possibly transgressing Cassirer’s self-understanding), a picture of experience as formed by the creative receptivity of the human spirit transpires, and inasmuch as language is the expression of this receptivity, the moment of experience turns into an immediate relation

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<sup>176</sup> The confrontation between Cassirer and Heidegger at the Davos-seminar, to which we shall return below (6.2), may have contributed to the stylization of pure ‘spontaneity’ of the spirit on Cassirer’s part and pure ‘responsivity’ of *Dasein* on Heidegger’s, cf. Gordon, 2010, 202 ff.

<sup>177</sup> Thus, pragmatically speaking, “one ought to ask, not what images are or what goes on when one imagines something, but how the word ‘imagination’ is used”, PU § 370.

<sup>178</sup> For instance: Cesar turns down his thumb and consequentially a gladiator, somewhere below him, thrushes his sword through the defeated combatant. The *magical immediacy* of communication is indeed consequential!

between word and content. The momentary god is the name of an impression, formed by means of a symbol, though the terror of the invisible may still linger on, accompanying the worship of the named unknown. In Wittgenstein, the form of the spirit reemerges as a form of life. The objectification of the mind as a privileged arbiter of truth and originator of meaning relapses into the presence of language in use. Whatever the source of anxiety, of hope, and of joy, their manifestation (or immediacy) is entirely social, their essence is language through and through. Clearly, Benjamin struggled with similar thoughts although the Kantian earmark of their initial expression led him to speak about “the communication of the contents of the mind” (op.cit. 62) as if the communicable is something other than the thing itself (cf. op.cit. 63). However, speaking about the ‘mental being’ which is capable of communication, he actually speaks about that which makes the human spirit what it is. “The linguistic being of things is their language”, says Benjamin, and “[m]an therefore communicates his own mental being (insofar as it is communicable) by naming all other things” (op.cit. 64). In other words, it is “the linguistic being of man is to name things” (ibid.). The world of immediate impressions retreats into the immediacy of linguistic relations. “Absolute experience is, in the view of philosophy, language – language understood, however, as systematic, symbolic concept”, as he phrases it in 1917 (SW, I, 96). By contrast, the moment of pure impression, prior to any form of language, and consequently, prior to any social frame of mind, is a dream of transcendence which denies its own conceptuality. It is the realm of blinding light, corresponding with Bataille’s surrealist notion of sheer continuity. It may also be Hölderlin’s ‘step into the open’, as the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard has pointed out (*Min Kamp*, vol. 6, 399), a poetic, yet life-forsaking, step into madness, where only death awaits. The pure moment lies outside the social (op.cit. 400 f); the pure moment is the revelation of nothing, of a *nameless* world (ibid.). As long as Hölderlin was still able to write, his poems remained in the social and merely gazed into the open (op.cit. 401), and, Knausgaard adds, “[r]eligion has always done that”.<sup>179</sup> Being users of language

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**179** Knausgaard would undoubtedly condone Benjamin’s view that man’s linguistic being is to name things. Yet, his thought is also to point out the tendency in man to ‘run against the boundaries of language’, as Wittgenstein once put it (cf. LE, 12, and Waismann, 1979, 117). By Knausgaard’s own attempt to understand what Hölderlin meant by the line “Come out into the open, my friend”, he illustrates – and exemplifies – this very longing for utopia (the place without a place) with poetic skill: “One step aside, and you are in the nameless world. It is blind, and you behold the blindness. It is chaotic, and it is the open, and it is meaningless, it is *the meaningless*. It is so divine, yes, it is *the divine*”. The simple burning of a match “is the flame of the divine. But it burns underneath the cover of language, it burns under the cover of the categories, it burns under the cover of all the contexts and connections, they spawn. The thought of an original state of human innocence, a kind of immediate world-presence, in what mythology calls the Garden of Eden, the place we come from and to which we long to return, because there we were at one with our surroundings and with God, in a sort of original state of nature, is deceiving, because it implicates time, a then and a now, while in reality there is only a now, while in reality everything only has a time: The flame of the divine burns now, The Garden of Eden exists

humans make something out of nothing, makes a place out of nowhere (utopia). The premise is, however, that nothing comes into focus in the first place. The premise is that nothing even becomes ‘nothing’. Looking as far back as possible into the history of mankind, we have relics of grave sites, manifestations of the departed. The significant ‘nothing’ seems to be that which departs from the social, from language (in the broad sense of symbolization), rather than something which enters it. Yet, ‘nothing’ is present all around from ‘the moment’ of language. ‘Nothing’ shines forth from that which lies beyond, although even that, i.e., ‘nothing’, is only perceptible from within language itself. For the same reason we are led astray by speaking of ‘nothing’ as if of a ‘thing’ (namely, that exact thing which is no *thing*). We are violating the use of language, although the violation itself is only another use of language and becomes an abuse only by implying a forgetfulness of this. Religion and science share this forgetting. Even philosophy does at times. However, the generality of this point makes it redundant, if not meaningless. If language is all there is, nothing is said. It would be the same as the Parmenidean statement of Being. If all there is, is all there is, nothing is. We will have to begin from something that comes to be, from the emergence of difference. Certainly Benjamin was aware of this. Thus, it is likely that Benjamin framed his line of thought in the language of myth and mystical theology in order to leave open – or not to violate – the origin of the linguistic being of man, that is, the ability to name things.<sup>180</sup> For if language forms our experience of the world, what forms our language? How does the decisive split come to be in the first place? Only myth seems able to offer an answer to this. And, at the same time, “[a]ll mythic meaning strives for secrecy”, as he writes a few years later in his critical exposition of Goethe’s novel *Elective Affinities* (Wahlverwandtschaften) (SW, I, 314).

“The equation of mental and linguistic being”, Benjamin writes:

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now, you just have to take a step to the side, and there you are. But that step is impossible for us to take, since we are humans, and that, which the step leads us into, is the inhuman” (op.cit. 401, my translation). Knausgaard rewrites the impossibility of the romantic dream of realizing the infinite, of reaching that which has no place, *the utopia*, and one senses in Knausgaard a sympathy similar to that of Wittgenstein who tells Waismann that although man tries in vain to escape language as if it were a cage, he [Wittgenstein] does not “scoff at this tendency in man” (Waismann, 1979, 118). “I hold it in reverence”, he says, “and here it is essential that this is not a description of sociology, but that I am speaking *about myself*” (ibid.).

**180** I think that Benjamin’s latest biographers, Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, phrase it rather well by holding that: “To illuminate the function of naming and its intrinsic relation to perception, Benjamin turns to the opening chapters of the biblical book of *Genesis*, not as revealed authority but as an index to ‘the fundamental linguistic facts’, taking language in the biblical sense ‘as an ultimate reality, approachable only in its unfolding, inexplicable and mystical’,” 2014, 89. Menninghaus likewise points out that Benjamin’s ambition is to unfold the magic character of naming from the intrinsic nature of language and not from the reference to a transcendent source, 1995, 22–24; 225 f.

is of great metaphysical moment to linguistic theory because it leads to the concept that has again and again, as of its own accord, elevated itself to the center of linguistic philosophy and constituted its most intimate connection with the philosophy of religion. This is the concept of revelation. (2004, 66)

For Benjamin a conflict between the expressible and the inexpressible follows intrinsically from all linguistic formation, yet it may lead us, falsely, to consider the inexpressible as “the last mental entity” (ibid.).<sup>181</sup> From the point of view of the equation of mental and linguistic being, the contrary becomes obvious, namely that “the deeper (that is, the more existent and real) the mind, the more it is expressible and expressed”, and this “is precisely what is meant by the concept of revelation” (op.cit. 67). Consequently, he claims that “[t]he highest mental region of religion is (in the concept of revelation) at the same time the only one that does not know the inexpressible (*Unaussprechliche*)” (ibid.). Apparently, this runs contrary to the suggestion that religion stands in relation to something ‘beyond’, but what Benjamin has in mind is clearly not the psychological impulse or transgressive tendency of a religious attitude. He speaks about religious language, the language of revelation, where everything which is unknown, nothing, and nowhere, has been given us in the form of the word. The power of the word of God is to let nothing disappear as nothing, by which nothing becomes, at the same time, expressible as ‘nothing’, for “this ‘Nothing’ comprises a wealth of mystical reality although it cannot be defined”, as Scholem writes of Jewish Kabbalism (1995, 25).

The revelation of the word is that which also makes the world come to be (a *creation ex nihilo* which, according to Kabbalist thought, is nothing but the inexpressible and humanly inconceivable God himself). “This means that God made things knowable in their names. Man, however, names them according to knowledge” (op.cit. 68). In language, the world becomes the world of humans. God only initiates his own creation and leaves it to man to complete it, that is, to name things. Yet, in order to make the world inhabitable, to keep ‘nothing’ at bay, as it were, humans exchange pure names with words according to knowledge. The prize for seizing everything by means of representation is the forgetting of names, gradually abandoning the magical content of pure language. Thus, the human act of naming eventually results in the fall rather than in the fulfilment of God’s creation. Initially, “the name” given to some-

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**181** If the concept of the inexpressible seems to contradict Benjamin’s concept of ‘linguistic being’ and his general notion of “language as the canon of perception” (GS 6, 66), it must be said, as Eiland and Jennings have pointed out, that “[n]either here nor in the letter to Buber does Benjamin attempt to justify this postulate of the ‘inexpressible’ and ‘noncommunicable’, which in some ways recalls the Kantian *noumenon*, the unknowable ‘thing in itself’ assumed to lie behind appearances” (2014, 88). However, as I read Benjamin, the inexpressible ensues entirely from a linguistically *intrinsic* concept of inadequacy corresponding with his concept of the ‘expressionless’ [*das Ausdruckslose*], which, in his essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, expresses the part of aesthetic beauty which cannot be reduced to semblance [*Schein*], SW, I, 350.

thing or someone by man, “is no closer to the word” of God “than knowledge is to creation” (ibid.), for the knowledge, according to which humans name things, does not correspond to the freedom and “creative infinity of the divine word”, but is bound to their situated, mortal point of view. The dispersion of the various tongues of human language testifies to this:

Since the unspoken word in the existence of things falls infinitely short of the naming word in the knowledge of man, and since the latter in turn must fall short of the creative word of God, there is a reason for the multiplicity of human languages. The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation – so many translations, so many languages – once man has fallen from the paradisiacal state that knew only one language. (op.cit. 70 f)

In the very fact that the human word must “communicate *something* (other than itself)... lies the true Fall of the spirit of language” (ibid.). So “the origin of abstraction, too, as a faculty of the spirit of language, is to be sought in the Fall” (op.cit. 72). On this point, Benjamin seems to share a concern with Heidegger. The thought about a fall of language, from the openness in the word of God to the abyss of abstraction, bears an apparent similarity with Heidegger’s non-mythical concept of the fall, the forgetfulness of Being, as it shows itself, for instance, in Plato’s doctrine of truth (cf. Heidegger, 2004, 177 ff), and in Aristotle’s concept of logos (2005, 255 ff). Once, the un-concealed (*unverborgende*) truth, *alētheia*, becomes visible, Plato turns the act of seeing, *idein*, into *idea*, i.e., the ‘seen’ is being transformed to ‘insight’, which is another word for that which lies beyond perception (Heidegger, 2004, 234). In Aristotle the *idea* is also captivated, though not in isolated thought, but in *eidōs*, located in the thing, that is, in *ousia* – that which is in possession of its own being (feminine present participle of εἶναι, *to be*) – and is acknowledged by logos. What is expressed by logos as true and false rests in the faculty of reason (*nous*) to make judgments (Heidegger, 2005, 256). Similarly, Benjamin surmises that the abstract elements of language “are rooted in the word of judgment” (2004, 72):

The immediacy (which, however, is the linguistic root) of the communicability of abstraction resides in the judgment. This immediacy in the communicability of abstraction came into being as judgment, when in the Fall, man abandoned immediacy in the communication of the concrete – that is, the name – and fell into the abyss of the mediateness of all communication, of the word as means, of the empty word, into the abyss of prattle [*Geschwätz*]. (ibid.)

Heidegger’s comparable concept of prattle (in terms of *Gespräch*)<sup>182</sup> as the inauthentic (*uneigentliche*), and therefore fallen, mode of logos<sup>183</sup> has an undeniable affinity to

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**182** It may be worth mentioning that Wolin finds a more obvious resemblance between Benjamin and Kierkegaard in this respect, op.cit. 43.

**183** I.e., λόγος (in the Aristotelean sense) as synonymous with *Rede* (Speech) which, according to our daily existence, deteriorates into mere *Gerede* (Talk), cf. SuZ, § 35, p. 168. Although Heidegger points

this.<sup>184</sup> We shall return to Heidegger later on, but, for the moment, stick to Benjamin's mythical discourse.

The fall of language expresses itself, according to Benjamin, in the abstracting abilities of our judgments. Actually, our capacity to make judgment is what has brought us the world we live in today, the world of science and technology. From merely naming things we have progressed into making predications according to empirically grounded criteria of truth. What we have lost from an original "contemplation of things", we have gained in control over the environment. By predicating it according to knowledge we have used it to our own advantage, but, at the same time, distanced ourselves from it. And the nature still mourns in her muteness, Benjamin would say. Her melancholy only increases by being named "by the hundred languages of man" as is the Babylonian expression of the fall. Once given by the word of God, nature stands to lose itself in the language of humans; her melancholy is the suppressed memory of the paradisiacal state. By taking over from God not only the power to name, but also the right to judge, humans have evicted themselves from the immediacy of nature (and yet made themselves slaves to it, as Adorno and Horkheimer

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to logos in its originary apofantic meaning as "the coming-into-view of something [*Sehenlassen von Etwas*], the synthetic character of which conjoins 'utterance' and 'matter', he still regards the criteria of predication (that is, the true-false distinction) ensuing from this σύνθεσις as derived from an initial discovering (*Entdecken*, § 7b, 33), not unlike Benjamin's regulative thought about a 'pure language' before and beyond predicative determinations.

**184** Benjamin himself was largely dismissive of Heidegger and offended by what he thought to be a negligent attitude towards the historical depth of being. Thus, in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem, he characterizes the way in which Heidegger deals with the problem of historical time as profoundly erratic (Benjamin, 1994, 82). Although this critique is directed to an early lecture on the concept of time that came to Benjamin's knowledge in 1916, he also attacked Heidegger's later view on 'Geschichtlichkeit' as being a vain attempt to save 'Geschichte' (history), cf. GS 5/1, 577. As Howard Caygill puts it, rather ingeniously I think: "It is the distinction between fulfilment *in* historical time and the fulfilment *of* historical time which marks the difference between Heidegger and Benjamin", 1994, 10. Apart from this difference between Benjamin and Heidegger, however entrenched it may be in the whole manner of their thinking (cf., for instance, Jennings, 2014, 91), it should not completely overshadow their mutual interest in redeeming a conception of truth from the throngs of empirical-predicative language as well as from a Kantian conception of transcendental realism. Hannah Arendt who was in personal contact with both Heidegger and Benjamin had a clear sense of these similarities and made a point about it. Thus, in her introduction to the first English selection of Benjamin's works, she brings a quote by Benjamin which is clearly reminiscent of some of Heidegger's pivotal views: "The conviction", Benjamin writes, "which guides me in my literary attempts ... [is] that each truth has its home, its ancestral palace, in language, that this palace was built with the oldest logoi, and that to a truth thus founded the insights of the sciences will remain inferior for as long as they make do here and there in the area of language like nomads, as it were, in the conviction of the sign character of language which produces the irresponsible arbitrariness of their terminology", Arendt, 1999, 51. For a balanced view on the agreements as well as disagreements between Benjamin's and Heidegger's revision of metaphysics, see the Danish Historian of Ideas, Dorthe Jørgensen (2014, 150–54; 250–1), who has worked elaborately on both Benjamin and Heidegger with regard to their view on aesthetics.



pointed out in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*). A great longing is the result, a longing for that original presence which is now lost in representation. At the end of his essay, Benjamin writes: “For language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable” (op.cit. 74). The dynamics of language, apart from the power of naming, show themselves in their ability to confront their own limits, to let us run against these limits as if language kept us in a cage.

Acknowledging this same tendency in himself, as pointed out above, Wittgenstein disclaims any interest in judgments concerning the ‘facts of the matter’ (although his Tractarian view of language was conceived exactly on the premise of its ability to state these facts unambiguously). Consequently, he tells Waismann that “what men mean when they say that ‘the world is there’ is something I have at heart” (op.cit. 118). The meaning of ‘the world is there’ may also be captured in Benjamin’s reference to the totality of existence (*Dasein*, SW, 1, 110) as well as *Dasein* in Heidegger’s terminology, namely, the ‘being there’. What matters is this ‘being there’ inasmuch as it *shows* how people live and think from their being *in* the world and their recognition of this world as a whole.<sup>185</sup> Religion, however, is also a pointing out of the world. It goes without saying that it does not show itself in the unknowable beyond, to which it *points* by means of representation, but in the communicability of revelation, the creation of another world which humans receive in faith as their real home. Actually, what Benjamin ends up saying is that the *symbol of the noncommunicable*, being part of the highest mental region of religion, *knows of nothing inexpressible*. This seems to be a paradox which for Benjamin needs to be clothed in mythical language. Only God has knowledge of his own creation, but he forms our use of language in accordance with his creative word in the sense that he gives us the power to bestow names. Yet, the creative power of naming is not the power to name things according to our mortally limited knowledge, our condemnation of having been given the faculty to make judgments (expressed as having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge). The real means of creation for humans is the act to dub, to baptize (or to christen, in Adamite language), to identify through *the proper name*.

“The proper name is the communion of man with the *creative* word of God” (op.cit. 69). Contrary to the human words for things, the name doesn’t correspond to anything, but, in a certain sense, creates what it names. Although the same name can be replicated and multiplied, like a categorical term (of ‘crabs’ or ‘crustaceans’, for instance), each name stands for a unique being contrary to the categorical term which sacrifices individuality at the altar of predicative judgment. Thus, the mystical

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<sup>185</sup> One of the first announcements of this, in modern philosophy, may very well have been Nietzsche’s view of his own mission as to prepare humanity for “the question about the why? the what-for? Asked for the first time in a total sense” (*die Frage des warum? Des wozu? Zum ersten Male als Ganzes stellt*, W, III, 1125).

theory that “the word is simply the essence of the thing” is false, because “the thing itself has no word, being created from God’s word, and known in its name by a human word” (ibid.). The thing itself, *Das Ding an Sich*, has no linguistic being, but – in the world it shares with human beings, illuminated by the word of creation – it got caught in the net of human language. Still, nothing in our knowledge of things is like the spontaneous creation of the word of God. The nature of things becomes silent in the representation of language, and yet, in “the mute magic of nature, the word of God shines forth” (ibid.).

Much later, when a Marxist influence as well as the urban modernism of Baudelaire replaced theological idealism (spawned from a combination of Kant and the Kabbala), Benjamin would develop a complex view of experience that spanned from an aesthetic of redeemed correspondences to the fragmentary optics of allegory.<sup>186</sup> Importantly, the immediacy of natural, or magical, correspondences “are the data of remembrance – not historical data, but data of prehistory”, glimpses of an earlier form of life (1999, 182). The concrete inspiration behind this vision of undisturbed being stems from Baudelaire’s poem *Correspondences* in *Flowers of Evil*, where nature is described as a temple, and human beings (*l’homme*) are observed with familiar eyes (*regards familiers*) by the forest of symbols (*forêts de symboles*) they pass through (p. 27). Everything is recognized immediately, the recognition of man corresponds with the recognition of nature, and the holiness of the latter still corresponds with the whole of everything there is. The generally suppressed memory of this unmediated presence of the world, apart from the truth-preserving manifestations in art, is a lasting motif in Benjamin’s writings. However, contrary to its revocation by Cassirer’s neo-Kantian philosophy of consciousness, it can only be redeemed, in Benjamin’s eyes, by Messianic intervention (op.cit. 247; 254), or, through a “weak Messianic power” with which we have been endowed (op.cit. 246). It pertains to the “secret agreement between past generations and the present one” and thus expresses our obligation to remember the victims of history. The ambiguity, here, concerning the passive versus active role of mankind is typical for Benjamin’s interacting perspectives of theology and historical materialism.<sup>187</sup> In one paragraph, he speaks in mythical terms of the Judgment Day as the moment when the ‘empty and homogenous time’ of historical progression is brought to a halt by recollecting the fullness of the past (ibid.). In another, he speaks about the task of the historical materialist “to brush history against the grain” (op.cit. 248). Obviously, these dimensions are interrelated, but not in a straight forward

<sup>186</sup> Cf. the poem *Allégorie* which was published in the 1857-version of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, cf. Menninghaus, 1995, 164 ff.

<sup>187</sup> This is pointed out concisely by Habermas (1972), who claims that Benjamin does not succeed to combine the Messianic concept of redemption with historical materialism insofar as the concept of *Jetztzeit* draws from an anti-evolutionary notion of meaning and history that is alien to a Marxist’s conception of the conditions of a historical time, 1972, 207.

manner. On the one hand, historical materialism is obligated to bring satisfaction to the victims of history by undoing the injustice incurred on them by Progression; thus, it must reveal the falsity of history as written by the victors. On the other hand, this revolution is dependent on a remembrance that seems to surpass mere human capabilities. “The true picture of the past flits by” (op.cit. 247); we see only “chips of Messianic time” (op.cit. 255), and we must look to the Messiah as “the redeemer” and “subduer of Anti-Christ” (op.cit. 247). What religion and historical materialism share is a rebellion against the barren slavery of the clock – the vehicle for homogenous and empty time – by means of calendars and their days of remembrance, as Benjamin mentions in passing (op.cit. 253).<sup>188</sup> True historical knowledge stems from days of revolution, captured in the calendar as by “a historical time lapse camera” (ibid.). And insofar as the oppressed class in society is another, albeit negative, depository for this historical knowledge, it is within reach for historical materialism to seize hold of the otherwise elusive flash of memory (ibid.). If the historical materialist remains in control of his powers, he will be “man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (op.cit. 254).<sup>189</sup> It may very well be that we find the same ambiguity between active awareness among the Proletariat and the intrinsic self-destruction of the Capitalist society in Marx himself, but that shall not occupy us here.

To some degree the religious figure of thought (the *Denkbild* in Benjamin’s terms) may be understood metaphorically, owing to the lack of means for putting it in post-metaphysical terms, but it may also be taken at face value, that is, as a theological philosophy of language which is deeply inspired by the Kabbalist tradition.<sup>190</sup> The

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**188** In another context, where he speaks of the experience of immediate correspondences, he states that what “makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life” (1999, 182), a point which is pretty much in line with Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer, cf. PO, 129 ff.

**189** As Richard Wolin points out in his intellectual biography of Benjamin: “[H]uman activity can play a role in the realization of this goal [of the origin], but since the realms of history and salvation are *antitheses*, human action can never have a *direct* effect in bringing it about; rather, its relation to the Messianic terminus always remain uncertain”, 1994, 39. As early as in 1920, Benjamin repudiated the thought of a religious justice of this world, as in theocracy, since “[o]nly the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic” (1978, 312). Though these statements belong to a period prior to his ‘conversion’ to historical materialism, the later thought of Messianic reconciliation in ‘pure presence’ (*Jetztzeit*) points towards an ahistorical intensity rather than the prospect of justice within the course of historical time, cf. Wolin, op.cit. 58.

**190** Cf. Wolin (1994, 39) for *pro et contra*. Bernd Witte emphasizes the theological view and speaks about Benjamin’s “mystical poetry” (1976, 130 ff), while the overall aim of Menninghaus’s study is to demonstrate Benjamin’s secular deciphering of language mysticism from a point of view of immanence (1995, 24, 188 ff). Habermas points out that Benjamin distances himself from any esoteric understanding of truth (cf. his early notion of the revelatory character of ‘religious teachings’) as soon as he senses the danger of fascism (1972, 200), and that he intends, in his later writings, to redeem a religious ‘Enlightenment’ (*Erleuchtung*) through a profane one within a materialistic and anthro-

point is, at any rate, that the fallen state of humans, which in Heidegger's phenomenological outlook would be the existential mode of *Uneigentlichkeit*, implies that they must look for a source of redemption that lies beyond the fraudulent promises of progression.<sup>191</sup> Intriguingly, Benjamin conceives the moment, as well as the end, of restoration as "the presence of the now", the 'Jetztzeit' (op.cit. 253). This fullness of presence, a *pure – and purified – moment*, is a time outside the course of history. It reconciles us with the victims of the past. It is also a restoration of immediate experience, a world of undisturbed correspondences where we are all looked upon with familiar eyes. But what is this world, we might ask (in light of our earlier musings), other than the blinding flames of the divine, the unbearable gaze of God? For Benjamin, who acknowledges the innermost inexpressibility of an original state of being, it is nothing but the creative moment of language, not some openness prior to the word, but the creative and nonviolent powers of calling the entities of our world by names!

At first sight, what Benjamin has in mind does not seem to be as far apart from Heidegger as he was himself inclined to believe. Heidegger's etymological reference to *alētheia* as the momentary self-revelation of Being and not least his later concept of 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) seem to disclose a similar route of thought, directed against the forgetfulness of traditional metaphysics, and it makes it relevant to compare them despite the profound difference in their notions of time and history.<sup>192</sup>

As this openness, the coming to light of the world in language itself, again retreats into hiding (as in Heidegger's *Verborgenheit*), obscured by the very words of its own revelation, the uniqueness of names turns into the unity of words and categories in Benjamin. Along with language we fall into the assumed correspondences between

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political context (op.cit. 201). Gabrielli, who offers an in-depth analysis of Benjamin's early essay on language (cf. above), finds that his Biblical reference serve to exemplify "die Sprache als 'letzte Wirklichkeit'", since it is language as such that occupies him "in ihrer Selbstbezüglichkeit, in ihrer ursprünglichen Kraft, 'Primarität' und schöpferischen Autonomie", 2004, 234 f. This also confirms the strains of Benjamin's romantic, rather than religious, inclinations.

**191** As Caygill has pointed out, Benjamin reacted harshly to Heidegger's notion of the possibility of redemption in historical time implying that "the present guilt may be redeemed in time by 'working through' and 'combatting' the past", 1994, 10. Thus, I tend to agree that: "As if anticipating Heidegger's development of ecstatic time as the horizon for gathering together past, present and future in *Being and Time*, Benjamin insists on the complete exteriority of Messianic time, one whose advent brings with it the 'cessation of happening'", *ibid.*

**192** It must be taken into account, however, that the Kabbalist notion of redemption that accompanies Benjamin's thinking has implications that differ essentially from the 'fundamental ontology' of *Sein und Zeit*. Thus, Wolin: "[T]hose who have, like Hannah Arendt, sought to link Benjamin to the Heideggerian tradition err greatly: it is less sheer being in its ontological immediacy that he seeks to exalt than a being which have never yet been", 1994, 102. Though, it may be correct to say that the concepts of *Jetztzeit* and correspondences transcend historical time, I am not sure that Benjamin would locate them beyond being, the redemption of which is committed to the immanence of the world. It cannot be denied, however, that Benjamin took exception to Heidegger's concept of historical time and even found it nonsensical, cf. above.

words and things which make us able to make judgments. Eventually, there is nothing behind this power – and this fall – of language other than the myth it invents as a ground for itself. Thus, religion is in Benjamin's eyes the attempt to name the name of all names, the name of God, as is well known from the Kabbalist meditation on YHWH.<sup>193</sup> The truth of the name is revealed by the name of truth, God's truth (which is no predicate to God, but rather God's proper name).<sup>194</sup> In the name of this unnamable hyper-name, mankind locates the real power to name and to judge. It is this hyper-name that man, again and again, takes in vain. The fall repeats itself: Until Judgment Day, or the step aside into the utopia of Messianic time.

Benjamin's philosophy of religion is grounded in a motive of redemption that he shares with his colleagues and friends of the so-called Frankfurt School, especially Adorno and Horkheimer.<sup>195</sup> It is permeated with a critique of the times amounting to a "world without spirit", as Marx had put it, and is deeply engaged with the prospect of combining materialism with the reclining potential of reconciliation rooted in religious tradition. Benjamin thus exchanged Marx' conception of religion as a spiritual surrogate in a secularized world with a metaphor of a hunchback who from his hiding place under a table controlled a set of strings by means of which he guided the actions of a visible puppet in a game of chess. The philosophical counterpart of the puppet, Benjamin remarked, is 'historical materialism'. The hunchback is associated with 'theology', "which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight" (1999, 245). Benjamin clearly realizes that the language of myth and religion has lost its apparent credibility, but he is reluctant to let the language of politics, or science, completely take over. Moreover, the secularized language suffers from the illusion of having overcome the spirit of religion. On the one hand, he claims that the utopian attitude of theology still covertly controls the game, on the other hand, he exposes

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**193** A similar thought is found in Knausgaard, vol. 6; the Kabbalist notion of YHWH, cf. Scholem, 1995, 151 ff; one may also, in this respect, refer to Nancy, who holds that 'god' is in a sense "the sovereign word, the name beyond all names, and in another sense it is the non-naming name that twinkles in the open space between all names", 2008, 119. Similarly, Wittgenstein muses that by identifying "one's own gods with the gods of other peoples ... [o]ne convinces oneself that the names have the same meaning" (PO, 131). This *could* be taken to mean that the names of the gods are acknowledged as nothing but functional designations, but then they wouldn't be *names* in the proper sense, and I surmise that if this were Wittgenstein's point, he wouldn't have used the word 'name' in the first place. Rather, the gist of his thought may rather be to intimate the religious inclination to think of an inexpressible 'open space' connecting divine names as identical.

**194** Thus, the holy name of God stands in the center of all things. As Scholem writes: "All creation – and this is an important principle of most Kabbalist – is, from the point of view of God, nothing but an expression of His hidden self that begins and ends by giving itself a name, the holy name of God, the perpetual act of creation. All that lives is an expression of God's language, - and what is it that Revelation can reveal in the last resort if not the name of God?", 1995, 17.

**195** The intellectual biographies of Walter Benjamin by Richard Wolin (1994) and Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (2014) are recommended for further insight into these relationships.

the judgmental language of human rationality as inherently unjust. The language of rationality, which is also the language of historical progression, cannot redeem the sin of forgetting the victims of the past.<sup>196</sup> Typical for the style of his thinking, he uses another metaphor to express this. Thus, his description of Paul Klee's painting called *Angel Novus* serves as a counterfactual simile for our obligation to remember and reconcile ourselves with the past. In Benjamin's words, the painting shows how one may picture:

The angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (1999, 258).

This is how the late Benjamin<sup>197</sup> describes the fall of man and language in terms of human folly and divine sadness. Still, the angel has his gaze fixed upon the past. The hope of redemption accompanies us into the future, though invested in a divine representative that is caught in the net of our self-righteousness, and in the violence of our forgetfulness. Benjamin's gaze is firmly fixed on history here, whereas in his early text on the language of man, his main attention was directed towards word and name. Still, a significant interrelation is visible through the conception of *the world*, the world of human language, which is a world that swallows up the pure moment in the flux of time, a world in which man has gained the power to denote, to predicate, and to make judgments, a world in which the victors seized 'history' and left its course to be conceived as empty, homogenous time. It is the world in which the univocity of the proper name has only kept its functional use, since everything is submitted to the regime of the universal. The necessary condition for bringing a person before the court of law is that this person can be identified by name and judged according to the universal principles of the law. The accused person is addressed by name but held responsible subject to anonymous rules. The individual assumes the responsibility of the citizen, the individual body is judged as part of the social body. The power to judge, epistemologically and as well as legally, is a civilizing power that we cannot – or will not – do without. Yet, it is, at the same time, a power that obscures

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**196** For a further theological development of this thematic, based primarily on Benjamin, see, for instance, Metz, 1972; Lenhardt, 1975; Peukert, 1978, 305–9.

**197** However, as Wolin has pointed out (1994, 61), much similar thoughts are found twenty years earlier in his *Theologico-Political Fragment*, and Klee's painting, made in 1920, was purchased by Benjamin probably the very same year, cf. Eiland & Jennings, 2014, 138. Its title also served as a name for a journal Benjamin intended to publish devoted to heralding 'the spirit of the age' (op.cit. 150), though nothing came of it.

the other power to create and redeem a world of living creatures, the power by which, Christianity tells us, we are to be judged on the last day. If all this, in a philosophical discourse of immanence (or profane acknowledgment), consists of images, similes of a language that raise their angelic voice from the past, what kind of insight can be salvaged from it, if any? What can Benjamin still tell us in a language that transcends theology and becomes a more general philosophy of religion?

## 5.4 A Juxtaposition of Benjamin and Wittgenstein

Inasmuch as I sense an undercurrent of shared intuitions in Benjamin and Wittgenstein, I shall set up a shadow-play of contrasts and similarities between them, not least in order to extract insights from Benjamin's esoterically tinged concepts of language, history, and religion, which may cast its own light on the project of this book.

I want to make clear from the outset that the difference between the philosophies of language in Benjamin and early Wittgenstein is grounded far deeper than in a matter of style. Although Benjamin speaks of the 'inexpressible' as entirely confined to the linguistic being of experience, the latter is, at the same time, conceived as a mimetic reading of entities in the world.<sup>198</sup> This thought, though clearly incompatible with the perspective of logical isomorphism in *Tractatus*, seems nonetheless parallel, at least to some extent, with the concept of 'perspicuous representation' that Wittgenstein develops in the period of transition between his early and his late philosophy. But there are points of comparison, worth taking notice of, between Wittgenstein's Tractarian catharsis and Benjamin's own inclination towards purity. And here we shall begin.

In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein made it clear that all sentences, the meaning of which consists in their being statements about the world, are of equal value (6.4). Therefore, there can be no ethical propositions (6.42). Ethics is transcendental like aesthetics (6.421). In fact, it is exactly on ethical and aesthetic grounds that Benjamin strives to redeem a world transcending that of facts. It is the deep potentials of aesthetic redemption that hold the power of reconciling the perspectives of philosophical, theological and historical points of view. Moreover, in 1918, the year in which Wittgenstein submitted *Tractatus* for publication, Benjamin related the metaphysical dimension of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), transgressing the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge (*Wissen*), to "the concrete totality of experience – that is, *existence* [Dasein]" (SW, I,

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<sup>198</sup> Although Adorno may have been right to point out the agreement between Benjamin's reference to the 'Unsagbare' und "die Sphäre des Wortlosen" and the expression of the ineffable in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Adorno, 1970, 305), I agree with Kobry (1990, 178) and Gabrielli (2004, 237) that the paradoxical nature of Benjamin's notion of language rather fits the perspective of the later Wittgenstein.



110). Striking a similar note in *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote: “The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole” (TLP 6.45).<sup>199</sup> The concrete sense – expressed as *Gefühl* by Wittgenstein, and as *Erfahrung* by Benjamin – of a world-totality thus forms a decisive theme for both, though contrary to Wittgenstein (TLP 6.522), Benjamin didn’t restrict himself to speak of this totality in terms of the *inexpressible*. What Wittgenstein termed as ‘mystical’ in the sense of what is ineffably given, Benjamin went all out to associate, philosophically, with the *teachings* of religion (SW, I, 109), the *mystical* character of which he referred, from his own point of view, to the concrete form of Kabbalism. The question is, however, how deep this difference goes. Firstly, Benjamin also acknowledged the inexpressible at the very core of language itself. Secondly, he didn’t continue to pursue the search for redeemed knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) in the teachings of religion. Instead he went to reflect critically on the insights of aesthetic knowledge (including art criticism), oriented towards allegory and the mosaic technique of montage, the purpose of which was to let *matters speak for themselves*. In a similar vein, the later Wittgenstein saw the task of philosophy in letting “the actual use of language” speak for itself, that is, to “leave everything as it is” (PI § 124). Of Benjamin’s montage-project one could easily say with Wittgenstein that “since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain” (§ 125).

Returning to their earlier thoughts, Wittgenstein shows in *Tractatus* the impossibility of ethical judgments in a propositional language (that is, language as representation). For Benjamin, however, such language is forgetful of an original *pure language*, a fall of ‘the concrete’ into ‘the abstract’. This obvious difference notwithstanding, Wittgenstein’s language-as-depiction-view serves, among other things, to counteract the violation of an ethical stance which both he and Benjamin regarded as non-propositional. They both reacted vehemently against metaphysics as a self-contained totality of theoretical knowledge (*Wissen*) and both partook, therefore, in the dawning recognition of insoluble negativity that came to dominate the philosophy of the 20th Century.

In *Tractatus* Wittgenstein speaks of the whole modern worldview (*Weltanschauung*) as “founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena” (TLP 6.371–372):

Thus people today stop at the laws of nature as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated by the ancients.

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<sup>199</sup> In German: “Die Anschauung der Welt *sub specie aeterni* ist ihre Anschauung als – begrenztes – Ganzes. Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das mystische.” One might also compare with Nietzsche, W, III, 1125, cited above, footnote 185.

In fact, both are right and both wrong: Though the view of the ancients is clearer, in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if everything were explained. (ibid.)

For Benjamin, the mimetic faculty of the ancients far surpassed that of ours today (SW, 2/2, 695), they revered the nonsensuous correspondences of unseen powers in terms of meaning rather than in terms of explanation and states of affairs.<sup>200</sup> This is certainly not how the mimetic faculty of language is described in *Tractatus* which, on the contrary, opens by defining the world as “everything that is the case”.<sup>201</sup> The world is a world of everything that can be depicted – and therefore stated – as facts. Nonetheless, *the world of each individual* may remain completely untouched by these facts. “The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy” (TLP 6.43),<sup>202</sup> though both may live under the same objective conditions. The meaning we may ascribe to the concrete world of our individual life is generated entirely by our *relationship with* the totality of facts, that is, from a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts, and this is what also becomes clear in magical practices (PO, 121–123). Moreover, it shows in what “men mean when they say that ‘the world is there’” (Waismann, 1979, 118).<sup>203</sup> This leads Waismann, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor, to ask: “Is the existence of the world connected with what is ethical?” Wittgenstein answers: “Men have felt that here there is a connection and they have expressed it thus: God the Father created the world, the Son of God (or the Word that comes from God) is that which is ethical.” (ibid.) We may recognize a slight shift between this statement and the Tractarian one about God who “does not reveal himself in the world”, but who, by implication, may be revealed in our belief in something higher (TLP 6.432). Although both statements probe into the kind of meaning attributable to a relation between God and the world, there is a movement in Wittgenstein’s thinking here, from demonstrating the ‘theological’ consequence of logical atomism in *Tractatus*, on the one hand, to dealing with the casual expressions of ‘men’, on the other. Restricted by the self-

**200** As an example, he refers to the nonsensuous similarity that makes up the zodiac system of meaning (SW, 2/2, 696; cf. also Menninghaus, 1995, 88; Eiland & Jennings, 2014, 103), and regards this as a primordial kind of *reading*. Moreover, in his epistemological prologue to *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (for short: *The Trauerspielbuch*), he defines the concept of idea along the same lines: “Die Ideen verhalten sich zu den Dingen wie die Sternbilder zu den Sternen”, 1978, 16.

**201** In German: “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist”.

**202** In German: “Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen”.

**203** I thus jump from *Tractatus* to Wittgenstein’s interlocutions with Waismann as late as in 1930, but my gist is that the main line of thought still holds concerning this matter of facts versus ethics. Another *passus* from Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*, dating also from 1930, reads “[I]t seems to me [...] that there is a way of capturing the world *sub specie aeterni* other than through the work of the artist. Thought has such a way – so I believe – it is as though it flies above the world and leave it as it is – observing it from above, in flight”, CV, 5e.

indulging rigidity of factual language, the author of the *Tractatus* is forced to say that what lies beyond the world, ‘the higher’ (*das Höhere*), remains inexpressible and can only *show itself* in our lives, that is, in our ethical and aesthetic relationship *with* the world of facts.

For Benjamin a similar relationship is encrypted in the heart of language as the suppressed reservoir of revelation and immediacy, the pure and original language of names, or language in a singular form prior to its dispersion in different tongues (SW, I, 71 ff). But that is an ideal and counterfactual language, determinable only in that which remains *expressionless* (*Ausdruckslos*) in the semblance (*Schein*) that clothes all representation (*Darstellung*). Thus, in his essay about the task of the translator, Benjamin criticizes the view of translation as fidelity to the literal meaning of words (op.cit. 79). It is only the imposition of empirical or dogmatic conditions of truth that makes a text is translatable according to literalness (op.cit. 82). However, “[i]f there is such a thing as a language of truth, the tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate truth which all strives for, then this language of truth is – the true language” (op.cit. 77). Language in this sense, however, is not true because of any correspondence with things, let alone determined by any *convention* of truth, but is *true rather because of the immediacy, or magic, of its naming power*. Seen from the point of view of the suprahistorical kinship of languages, ‘true language’ comprises the intentions “underlying each language as a whole”, and is realized as “pure language” only in the “totality of their intentions supplementing each other” (op.cit. 74). Yet this original language, which is closer to the remembrance of God than the remembrance of man (op.cit. 71), is not – or no longer, if it ever were – the language we speak. It is the language of utopia rather than a language of this world.

Certainly, the language of *Tractatus* also has a utopian ring to it and harbors its own vision of purity. Part of the difference between Wittgenstein and Benjamin is that the latter seeks a purity of language through aesthetic-religious redemption (and *vice versa*), whereas the young Wittgenstein seeks a purification of language through the logical reflection of its undistorted function as depiction. Both, however, would agree that what is really important in our existence as human beings transcends the dumb reality of facts.

For Benjamin, a detachment of value and pure expressive form from the nature of language *as language* discloses the fall from ‘concrete’ to ‘abstract’. Therefore, he hails the way in which aesthetic shock effects as, for instance, in surrealism – but also in swearwords and obscene idioms (cf. Menninghaus, 1995, 146 f; 180) – bring back the concrete, even uncanny, ‘aura’ of expression. Inasmuch as the shock of sensual manifestation, for instance, disrupts the abstracting and somnambulistic effects of factual language it may liberate the expressive potential of a ‘higher experience’.<sup>204</sup>

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**204** The prospect of “a higher kind of experience [höhere art der Erfahrung] yet to come” stems from his critique of “the low-level concept of experience”, whose “quintessence was Newtonian”. It grew

However, when it comes to the eye-opening quality of art, Benjamin is at the same time aware that the hunchback of theology may still pull the strings behind its revolutionary force. He never comes to regard philosophy, in the form of aesthetic criticism, as an incentive to change this condition, but rather to salvage the truth content reflected in the form of ‘representation’ (*Darstellung*).<sup>205</sup>

For the later Wittgenstein, who admits a tendency to regard every problem from a religious point of view, while not a religious person himself (Drury, 1984, 79), religion is, first of all, a form of life, not a theory about the world.<sup>206</sup> Rather than defining things of this world by way of propositional truth, religion expresses a tendency to see things in a certain light. Similarly, for Benjamin, truth, as it is intended by pure language (1978, 9), does not conform to the knowledge of the world, but rather pertains to the form of its own representation (op.cit. 11). And as the ‘form of life’ is something given for Wittgenstein (PPF, 1, 345), so is ‘truth’ for Benjamin (op.cit. 18). Truth, in Benjamin’s terms, is not a result of cognition, but a unity in being (*Einheit im Sein*) which opens up for its own conceptualization (op.cit. 12). Truth is not derived by empirical phenomena, but is formed by ideas which, as non-intentional (*intensionslos*) as things in themselves, reveal their essence through *the name*.<sup>207</sup> The conceptual chain, by which Benjamin here links together truth, representation, idea, and name, stems from his epistemological (*Erkenntnistheoretische*) introduction to the book on the baroque, German mourning plays (the ‘*Trauerspielsbuch*’), in which he couples the Kabbalist view on language with a Platonic view of ideas. Plato’s ‘ideas’ are nothing, Benjamin claims, but deified words and concepts (1978, 18) which, in

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out of the Enlightenment concept of reason and had a “restricting effect on Kantian thought”, SW, I, 101 f; GS, II.1, 160. There is reason to believe that this intuition towards a broader, and more basic, concept of experience also informed his hope for a redemptive aesthetics, cf. Wolin, 1994, 126 ff.

**205** See, for instance, 1978, 11.

**206** Although the concept of ‘form of life’ stems from his later period, it may, in some restricted sense, describe his view on religion in his early thinking as well, cf. Waismann, op.cit. 117. Pertaining to our appreciation of Wittgenstein’s remark to Drury, I think Thomas D. Carroll rightly draws attention to the implied “paralleling of grounding belief in God to the grounding of meaning in grammar”, 2014, 26.

**207** Thus, it is clear that Benjamin’s concept of ‘idea’ is very far from Hegel’s, when the latter, in his philosophy of religion, speaks of the absolute freedom of subjectivity as the *idea* that has not yet realized itself as Spirit (*Geist*) in the representations of the Greek gods, cf. Hegel, 1986, II, 105. Where the Greek gods, in Hegel’s view, are expressions of ‘the general’ (*Das Allgemeine*) and, therefore, anticipating the idea of the ‘general eternal subjectivity’ (*allgemeine unendliche Subjektivität*, ibid.), they are rather, for Benjamin, ideas by way of being names of language in its concrete, not yet abstracting, sense. In general, I have to confess that contrary to a Hegelian dialectics, religious symbols and concepts are not, in this book, appreciated in light of their standing within dialectical development of reason and Spirit. When Hegel claims, for instance, that an abstract concept of pure transcendence (such as Brahma) is empty inasmuch as it mediates no concrete subjectivity (i.e., it produces no difference between the universal and the individual, Hegel, 1986, I, 348 ff), I would restrict myself to say that it is empty – or nothing – in a religiously fulfilled sense of being Nothing, where ‘Nothing’ still has an expressive quality apart from – or beyond – its being dialectically unproductive.

light of the Adamite name-giving, means that they harbor traces of a paradisiac state by means of pure language (op.cit. 19). Expressed in mundane terms, Benjamin seems to regard ‘the idea’ as the *symbolic* part of language that becomes hidden in the profane service of empirical criteria of cognition (op.cit. 18). His whole philosophy, as it seems, aims to find ways of redeeming this *symbolic* truth.

The Platonic and theological discourse adopted by Benjamin in his attempt to free language from its dispersion in various tongues and from its predicative, judgmental, and scientific impoverishment, is as far from Wittgenstein’s philosophical style as one can imagine. For Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, the attempt to conceptualize the foundation of world and language is doomed to fail. The rules of propositional meaning are solely able to express *how* the world is, not *that* the world is (TLP 6.44). Leaving aside the content of all possible knowledge and cognition, the young Wittgenstein thus saw himself confronted with an inexpressible void as Benjamin did, emerging from the fact that everything, world and language, already is. The facts of nature, as expressed in the denotative, or empirico-logical, use of language, are entirely irrelevant in this respect. To ask about the beginning of the world is similar to asking about God or about the world *as a whole*. Neither can find its foothold *in* the world. A comparable acknowledgement, as I take it, led Benjamin to speak of language – in its pure and original sense – as exactly the word of God, that is, as anything but a thing of this world. Although Benjamin conceived the mystical, or the occult (*Geheime*), as he alternately calls it, in the Kabbalist understanding of language as revelation, he didn’t buy into any “revealed authority”, as Eiland and Jennings have rightly pointed out (2014, 89). What occupied him was entirely the inexpressible conditions of meaning immanent in language itself (Menninghaus, 1995, 22).<sup>208</sup> He might even have sensed and, furthermore, taken his own point of departure in what Foucault in *The Order of Things* describes as the epistemic spirit of the 19th Century. If, as Foucault states with reference to Nietzsche, ‘man and God’ continue to appear inseparable, “it is not because of some invincible propensity to go beyond the frontiers of experience, but because [the] language [of man] ceaselessly foment[s] him in the shadow of [the] laws [of God]” (1970, 298). Yet, the divine subject (and order) is not only inscribed in the metaphysics of grammar, as was Nietzsche’s point in *The Twilight of the Idols* (ibid.), but also hides in the demystifying will to truth “in the depth of discourse [...], in the modern form of criticism” (ibid.). Having Nietzsche as one of its proponents, this unmasking attitude testifies to a culture, Foucault says, in which “God is perhaps not so much a region beyond knowledge as something prior to the sentences we speak” (ibid.). Benjamin’s attempt to ‘ground’ language may be seen in pretty much the same light. Thus, contrary to the explicit teachings (*Lehre*) of a religious tradition, for which everything is, in principle, expressible, language para-

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<sup>208</sup> Actually Benjamin’s long-term friend Gershom Scholem, who was vested in the study of the Jewish Kabbala, seems to follow the same line of thinking, cf. 1973, 8.

doxically symbolizes the inexpressible, or the expressionless, because of the fact that it expresses something other than itself and therefore cannot self-presently reveal its own nature. In short: Language cannot re-present language, only God can.<sup>209</sup>

More specifically, the expressionless (*Das Ausdruckslose*), in Benjamin's aesthetic philosophy, is an objection (*Einspruch*) against pure semblance as well as against pure materiality. It is rather the materiality (of the word or a work of art) as pure form (SW I, 224 f) and it thus reveals itself as a caesura between content and word as this also reveals itself between the matter of aesthetic expression and the silent power of representation itself, "the pure word", as Hölderlin calls it (cf. Benjamin, SW, I, 340).<sup>210</sup> For the same reason, or in order to save the element in language which transcends a referential function, language must be apprehended as having its (unspeakable) origin in the word of God, the being of pure language prior to the being of the language we speak. Nevertheless, the expressible and the inexpressible link up, mystically, in the secrecy of myth (cf. GS 1.I, 17 f). Leaving the framework of a Kabbalist tradition aside, this thought seems to enter the same terrain, after all, as that of the ineffable (*Unaussprechliches*) in *Tractatus*. Language can express anything but itself, its own form. It is given tacitly. Or it gives itself in silence. Myth is a way of expressing this silence, that is, of expressing that which cannot be expressed. The same function pertains to the 'nonsensical' sentences of *Tractatus*, although the redeeming power is, by way of its logical order, of a different kind.

Let me say, in passing, however, that I shall not, in this book, allow either myth, theology, or science the final capacity to exhaust or define the potential, let alone origin, of language. The same goes for philosophy, the difference being, however, that philosophy may take pains to keep language open. As I read Benjamin, his discourse is dressed in theological and metaphorical terms partly because of the call for redemption that drives it. It is this call for redemption that keeps the dwarf of theology alive and active. I should like to appreciate this as a certain way of performing the task of keeping language open. Wittgenstein's discourse explicitly avoids metaphori-

<sup>209</sup> This is actually in line with Eddie Zemach's interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, 1966, 364.

<sup>210</sup> Foucault makes a similar point, I believe, in his essayistic exposition of Velasquez' painting *Las Meninas*. Thus, in the opening paragraphs of *The Order of Things* (translated from *Les mots et les choses*, 1966), he describes Velasquez's motif as "though the painter could not at the same time be seen on the picture where he is represented and also see that upon which he is representing something", 1970, 4. What happens historically (and epistemologically) in the painting, according to Foucault, is that "representation came into being ... only to dissolve once more into the light", op.cit. 15. However, the implication of Benjamin's concept of 'the expressionless' seems more far-reaching than Foucault's 'ce plus' (that which transgresses discourse, 1969, 67). In a short notice on 'Semblance' (*Schein*), which in Foucault's aesthetic harbors nothing but the form itself, Benjamin takes up a distinction also introduced in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, namely that between semblance and truth in art. Thus, the quivering of life, in an emotional voice or in the beautiful semblance of artistic representation, would roam freely were it not for the arresting paralysis of truth that may arrest it. And this truth, Benjamin holds, is the expressionless objection (*Einspruch*) against pure semblance (SW, I, 224).

cal language and develops into a pragmatic reflection on various uses of language. It is this perspective, all else being equal, that also informs this book. Still, the thoughts of Wittgenstein and Benjamin reach a point of near-unification in the view of magical immediacy, in the power of the name, where humans receive as well as *create* a world of their own. And both Wittgenstein and Benjamin point to the forgetfulness that characterizes their time and the contemporary, albeit dubious, trust in progression (Benjamin, 1999, 249; Wittgenstein, CV, 6e).

Thus, Wittgenstein deprecates Ernest Renan's evolutionary notion that scientific knowledge of modern man has cured the mind of its primitive fear of natural phenomena (CV, 5e): "As though lightning were more commonplace or less astounding today than 2000 years ago. Man has to awaken to wonder – and perhaps so do peoples. Science is a way of sending him to sleep again" (ibid.). Wittgenstein's point here is directly comparable with his slightly later *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, where he notes that "no phenomena is in itself particularly mysterious, but any of them can become so to us, and the characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that a phenomenon comes to have meaning for him" (PO, 129). The awakening of the human spirit is directly connected to regarding something as *meaningful* rather than being merely a fact. What impresses us in magical rites, Wittgenstein holds, is a kind of meaning that surpasses that of a purely cognitive content associated with an instrumental purpose. Benjamin's notion of experience as more than the mere registration of facts seems to point in the same direction (cf. SW, I, 104).<sup>211</sup> Thus, modern man has lost the capacity to perceive the range of similarities characteristic of mythical thinking, and Benjamin writes:

If, at the dawn of humanity, this reading from stars, entrails, and coincidences was reading *per se*, and if it provided mediating links to a newer kind of reading, as represented by runes, then one might well assume that this mimetic gift, which was earlier the basis for clairvoyance, very gradually found its way into language and writing in the course of a development over thousand years, thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive for nonsensuous similarity. (SW, 2/2, 697)

The 'reading' that Benjamin refers to, here, is far closer to Wittgenstein's notion of a whole mythology being embedded in our language than Max Müller's notion of an inherent forgetfulness in mythical language. Whereas Müller presumes a kind of correspondence theory of language on behalf of its original function, language for Benjamin corresponds to nothing but itself. And language is *per se* nothing but relations of nonsensuous similarity. Moreover, just like glimpses of Messianic time, "[t]he percep-

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<sup>211</sup> In relation to Benjamin's focus on precognitive experience in the *Program of the Coming Philosophy*, his recent biographers, Eiland and Jennings, interpret it as an "increasingly decisive 'anthropological' thrust of Benjamin's thinking" (2014, 103), which may also harmonize with Wittgenstein's ponderings about a 'philosophical anthropology', cf. PO, 129.



tion of similarity is in every case bound to a flashing up. It flits past [*huscht vorbei*], can possibly be won again, but cannot really be held fast as can other perceptions" (SW, 2/2, 695). Likewise, he talks about "the true picture of the past", which "flits by" [*huscht vorbei*] in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1999, 247). Resembling Wittgenstein's notion of the awakening of the human mind, Benjamin thus speaks of the awakening function of dialectical images.<sup>212</sup> They manifest a nexus between past and present that does not follow a line of progression, but rather a moment of immediate recognition (a "Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit", cf. Gabrielli, 2004, 631). Dialectical images let us see ourselves through glimpses of the past as well as *vice versa*.

Contrary to Wittgenstein, however, the declining ability to perceive these nonsensuous similarities is, for Benjamin, inscribed in the theological figure of the fall which parallels the forgetfulness doubly victimizing the victims of historical progress.

That being said, Wittgenstein strived, in the beginning of the 30's, to establish a point of view which likewise bypassed the contemporary belief in historical progress. His occupation with the issue of immediate *impression* and the requirement of a *perspicuous representation* (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) as a result of his engagement with the description of magical rites in *The Golden Bough*, resembles, at least in some respects, that of Benjamin's nonsensuous similarities.<sup>213</sup> Returning to the concept of perspicuous representation within the framework of his pragmatic view on language, Wittgenstein regards it of fundamental significance inasmuch as it "characterizes the way we represent things [*unsere Darstellungsform*], how we look at matters", and he adds, in brackets, "Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?" (PI § 122). The open question seems to be whether or not the form of singular propositions stands in a continuous relation with our *whole* representation of the world, at a given time. Such view was precluded, at any rate, in *Tractatus*. But in the *Philosophical Investigations* the perspective of logical atomism is, as is well known, abandoned.

In his 'historical theses' the aging Benjamin, writes:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthu-

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**212** In the 'theses' on history, he writes that "[t]hinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad" (1999, 262), and this monad is what he generally terms a 'dialectical image'.

**213** Gabrielli makes a strong case of following up on this similarity, 'joining links', as it were, to their mutual interest in Goethe, 2004, 167 ff; 632 ff. However, for reasons given above and below, I cannot subscribe to Gabrielli's way of interpreting neither Wittgenstein's concept of 'perspicuous representation', nor Benjamin's concept of 'nonsensuous similarities', or 'dialectical images', as methodical in nature. Contrary to Gabrielli (op.cit. 172), I am not happy, moreover, with linking the conception of *sub specie aeternitatis* in early Wittgenstein with his concept of 'perspicuous representation', which, as I see it, already expresses a move away from the dream of a static overview, characteristic of the *Tractatus*-period.

mously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' [Jetztzeit] which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. (1999, 255)

The redemptive potential of a paradisiac state, which still lies behind Benjamin's view, is clearly absent in Wittgenstein's, but both authors concur in regarding the foundation of knowledge as an engagement with the world, and with history, as a whole. For Benjamin history becomes *real* history only in light of relations established between the present and the past.<sup>214</sup> The connection with the past that makes us understand real history must be able to span over thousands of years. In this respect, a causal explanation is of no use for understanding that which connects us with those who lived on the earth before us.

The point of non-causal connection is also prominent in Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer's historical hypotheses (including the causal explanations of magic) as being beside the point. For Wittgenstein, it is not primarily the thought of a possible origin of human sacrifice behind the Beltane Fire-Festivals that constitutes the uncanniness of the practice. Rather, the unsettling impression stems from something accessible to us from our own immediate experience. It pertains to an 'imponderable evidence', deeply imbedded in our form of life. Benjamin, on his part, holds that "[t]he very greatest capacity for the generation of similarities", apart from the production of similarities in nature, "belongs to human beings" (SW, 2/2, 694). Similarly, in the remarks on Frazer, Wittgenstein speaks about "the importance of finding *connecting links*" (PO, 133), and tries to bring this to fruition in his later remarks on Frazer, where, for instance, he regards the Beltane Festival as a play "similar to children playing robbers" and to "the fact that on certain days children burn a straw-man" (PO, 149). Benjamin notes that "[c]hildren's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behavior" (SW, 2/2, 694).<sup>215</sup> I find it reasonable to claim that we have thus reached a point of especially relevant comparison between Benjamin and Wittgenstein (towards his later philosophy) pertaining to the human perception (and creation) of similarities.<sup>216</sup> Significantly, neither Wittgenstein nor Benjamin wants to locate these similarities in sensuous or abstract connections, but rather in the *inclination* towards a "secret law",

<sup>214</sup> In comparison, Gabrielli points out the ethical-aesthetical premises on which Wittgenstein and Benjamin agree in arranging the events of history, 2004, 224.

<sup>215</sup> Thus Menninghaus holds Benjamin's reference to "die im 'Kinderspiel' wirksamen 'Verhaltensweisen'" to be decisive for his concept of mimesis and nonsensuous similarities, 1995, 61.

<sup>216</sup> In support of this point of comparison, I refer to Gabrielli's carefully detailed juxtaposition of 'imponderable evidence' in Wittgenstein and 'nonsensuous similarities' in Benjamin, 2004, 186 ff. (especially on page 190).

as Wittgenstein puts it (PO, 133).<sup>217</sup> “All mythic meaning strives for secrecy”, Benjamin says in a similar vein (as noted above), when commenting on an opaque layer in Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (1978, 314). And indeed the same inclination is exactly found in Goethe (a profound influence for both Wittgenstein and Benjamin). In a lecture held in 1933, Wittgenstein compared Frazer’s attempt to explain the Beltane Fire Festival with Goethe’s idea of an original plant (*Urpflanze*) behind the existing variations of plants: “Goethe says: ‘They all point to a hidden law’. But you wouldn’t ask: What is the law? *That* they point is all there is to it”<sup>218</sup> (Wittgenstein, cf. Rothhaupt, forthcoming). It is our very idea of similarities that arrests Wittgenstein’s thought. What matters, philosophically, is thus not to “look for anything behind the phenomena” (cf. Klagge, 2003, 23), but to describe the links we are inclined to join between them. Our very proclivity to make certain connections, which may or may not stem from a certain worldview (cf. PI § 122), is part of the puzzle, and by describing this proclivity we may learn more about ourselves than if we blindly submit to it in search for an explanation of a hidden cause.<sup>219</sup>

Benjamin would clearly agree that our mimetic faculty cannot be subjected to a hypothetical explanation, but rather informs the very preference accorded to science, although in a withered, muted and unjust form (especially when it comes to history-writing in the normal sense, as shown above). The question is, however, whether his reading of Goethe as well as the Platonic inclinations, stemming from the same period, encourages him to subscribe to an occult origin of ideal truth. I think not. In his essay on Goethe he writes that “[s]ince he did not define ‘true’ nature conceptually, he never penetrated to the fruitful center of an intuition that bade him seek the presence of ‘true’ nature as *ur*-phenomenon in its appearances – something he presupposed in works of art” (SW, 1, 314). However, as Benjamin asserts: “The *ur*-phenomena do not exist before art; they subsist within it” (op.cit. 315). A crucial point in his commentary on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* is, therefore, that the author seemed to fall victim to a mythical stratum of his own work because of his failure to realize this. Inasmuch as a contamination of art and nature, spirit and matter, informs the work of

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**217** There are indeed intriguing interrelations between Wittgenstein’s and Benjamin’s reference to ‘the secret’ (*Das Geheime*, Benjamin, GS, II, 307 = SW, 2/1, 216), and ‘the riddle’ (*Rätzel*, Wittgenstein PO, 150; *Rätzelhaften*, Benjamin, GS, II, 307), behind the (nonsensuous) experience of connections, which do not relate, in any way, to ecstatic mysticism, but rather to the background of daily life, which is, likewise, the point of departure for Stanley Cavell’s essay on the uncanny, 1988.

**218** In Goethe’s *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, we read that “Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern;/ und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz,/ auf ein heiliges Rätzel...”. As Rothhaupt points out, it is “[n]icht das ‘geheime Gesetz selbst’, nicht das ‘heilige Rätzel’ als solches [die] für Wittgenstein massgebend [ist], sondern das Deuten des Chor ist für ihn ausschlaggebend”, Rothhaupt, 2015.

**219** This point of view is recognizable in Wittgenstein conception of ‘family resemblance’ which he introduces by dealing with the concept of ‘games’, PI, § 66.

Goethe, “sensuous nature already appears to claim the highest place, its mythic face triumphs in the comprehensive totality of its appearance” (ibid.). When the mimetic faculty serves the purpose of art, Benjamin claims, it doesn’t engage in a cognitive function but produces truth solely *in the presence of its own representation* (*Darstellung*), i.e., “als ein sich Darstellendes” (1978, 11 f). On the one hand, he embraces the Platonic conception of ideas as *something given* (*ein Vorgegebendes*) prior to any empirically based knowledge (op.cit. 12 ff), on the other hand, he dismisses the notion of participation. The ideas are merely “the objective, virtual arrangement” of the phenomena (ibid.). In this sense, they “relate to things as the constellations [of the Zodiac] relate to the stars” (ibid.). Ideas neither constitute concepts (*Begriffe*) nor laws (*Gesetze*) insofar as they don’t provide any knowledge of natural phenomena, but compose an interpretation of their ‘togetherness’ (*Zusammengehörigkeit*), a togetherness which, at the same time, saves the unicity of each (op.cit. 17). This is what Benjamin understands as the creative function of the mimetic faculty – eminently displayed in *the name*. Ideas are therefore nothing but the essence of language. In the division between the conceptual knowledge of things and their artistic representation, the one doesn’t exactly contradict the other, but it is the latter rather than the former which *redeems* the phenomena by representing them according to ideas instead of concepts (ibid.). What this representation (*Darstellung*) brings forth is not the nature of things in themselves, but our relation to them. “[T]he truth in a work [of art]”, as Benjamin puts it, “would be known not as something obtained in answer to a question, to be sure, but as something obtained on demand” (SW, 1, 334). Ideas are not materially present, either in art or in myth, but in the role expressions, such as art and myth, take up in our lives. Hence, “from the moment reflection raises itself up from the foundations of the novel to the vision of its perfection, philosophy not myth is called upon to guide it” (ibid.). Though Benjamin clearly adopts Goethe’s concept of ‘ideal’ in this reference to ‘perfection’ (alias *idea*), he regards the attending realization of truth as a matter for philosophy rather than for any aesthetic or expressive fulfilment. In my view, he therefore concurs with Wittgenstein in regarding our general view of things as deeply imbedded in an ethical stance towards the world. A perspicuous representation, hinting at a worldview or, as in Benjamin, the universal dimension of a mimetic faculty in our reception of the world, may open our eyes for this basic relationship. Importantly, both agree that it doesn’t point to something that already exists – in itself – but something that is always in the making owing to the way in which we see – and commit ourselves to – the world around us.<sup>220</sup>

In order to sum up, we must emphasize that no paradisiacal state seems to hide behind the fragile immediacy of mimetic relations for Wittgenstein. In his eyes, no redemptive power is to be gained from recognizing them. Thus the substitution of

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<sup>220</sup> Benjamin can say that the *ideas* are already given in the sense that we are already inclined to view things – and our relations with them – in a certain way.

concrete ‘magical’ immediacy by a language of abstraction and denotation, which, in Benjamin’s eyes, testifies to the fall of language and man, seems merely an illusion of being able to explain everything in Wittgenstein’s. However, the *concreteness* of pure expression – i.e., name-giving – in Benjamin’s philosophy of language<sup>221</sup> has a remarkable parallel in one of Wittgenstein’s commentaries on Frazer. “Why shouldn’t it be possible for a person”, he writes, “to regard his name as sacred? It is certainly, on the one hand, the most important instrument which is given to him, on the other, like a piece of jewelry hung around his neck at birth” (PO, 127). The very thought that a name might not be reduced to its instrumental, albeit identifying, use, but can also express a magical link between name and person, points in the direction of magical immediacy in Benjamin’s sense. The name partakes in the object as its “supra-essence”, meaning that “it signifies the relation of the object to its essence” (SW, I, 90). The name is neither the essence of the object, nor merely a word or a sign for it (op.cit. 91). The word (of a thing) is, on the hand, adapted to knowledge through concept, and, on the other, rooted in the name as ‘truth’ (ibid.). As expressed by Novalis: “Words are not universal signs, but rather tones, words of magic” (my translation).<sup>222</sup> But what is magic and truth in this ‘non-propositional’ sense? “In perception [Wahrnehmung]”, which, for Benjamin, is the concrete, linguistic [*sprachliche*] sense of meaning, “the useful is true [*wahr*]” (SW, I, 92; GS VI, 32). Taking the juxtaposition between Wittgenstein and Benjamin as far as it might go, I shall thus venture to say that *Benjamin’s notion of concrete meaning seems, in certain respects, to correspond with the later Wittgenstein’s concept of meaning as use*. The use of pet-names, for instance, by which we not only address, or refer to, persons (and other objects), but also express an emotional relationship with them in an inter-personal, and perhaps esoteric, manner, might serve as an example of non-propositional lan-

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<sup>221</sup> Benjamin, however, introduces a distinction between the mythical secrecy, by which a divine nature communicates with man through the riddle (*Das Rätsel*), and the secret of the Adamite name-giving bestowed on nature by man, GS VI, 18.

<sup>222</sup> In German: “Worte sind nicht allgemeine Zeichen – Töne sind es – Zauberworte”, *Schriften II*, 533. Novalis regarded his own concept of magic, as “mystische Sprachlehre”, to be one of the basic ideas of Kabbalism (Novalis, *Schriften*, 1983, 3, 266), and Benjamin, who was clearly influenced by Novalis, may have gathered some of ideas about the mystic quality of language from him, though he didn’t exactly buy into the romantic notion of a sympathetic relation between sign and object, cf. Novalis, ibid. One of Benjamin’s contemporaries, Oswald Spengler, utters a view of ‘the name’ that points in both directions: “Nothing has essentially changed from the ‘name-magic’ of primitive people to the most modern science, which subdues the objects by shaping them through names, that is, technical terms” (*Vom ‘Namenzauber’ der Wilden bis zur modernsten Wissenschaft, welche die Dinge unterwirft, indem sie Namen, nämlich Fachausdrücke, für sie prägt, hat sich der Form nach nichts geändert*), 1972, 109. Benjamin would rather say, I guess, that the scientific subjugation (cf. *Unterwerfung*) of a thing or phenomenon under the name represents a fall from language. Thus, contrary to Benjamin, Spengler clearly understands the original name-giving as *conceptual*, op.cit. 161. Both may agree, however, that the magic of naming creates a spellbound relation between human beings and the world.

guage use that unites both views. Magic and truth meet in words of love. Thus, a clear parallel can be drawn between Benjamin observing that “[t]wo persons who are in love are exceptionally devoted to each other’s name”<sup>223</sup>, and Wittgenstein intimating that “[k]issing the picture of one’s beloved” correlates with a magical representation, which is anything but instrumental (PO, 123).

In works of art, in which the ‘name’ is likewise turned into a sensual correlate, meaning may also become detached from its instrumental use and obtain a new, immediate function, namely, in the instant relation between the work and the recipient. Something comparable may very well be at stake in religion, although the degree of interpretative freedom will typically be much more restricted. Thus, where confessional forms of religion are bound up with dogma, the symbolic form of post-auratic art serves, as a matter of principle, to challenge authoritative restrictions of meaning. But does this entail that the frame and range of meaning expectations in religion and art are incompatible? I think not.

## 5.5 Religion as Name-Giving

In religion, names are given in light of the beyond. Divine names are names *of* the beyond, names that make up another world, whereas names of this world only pertain to it. They are contingent and exchangeable inasmuch as they are given to entities *in the world*. An example of this, which also demonstrates the difference between expression and predication, can be seen in the play of names that allows us to sense the essence of the ancient Greek virgin goddess of the harvest (or more precisely: the ear of corn). She enters myth in the form of *Kore* (κόρη) which, apart from being her name, means ‘girl’.<sup>224</sup> Being abducted by Hades, the king of the underworld, she becomes Persephone, and as such she rules in the world of the dead. As the story goes, Demeter reacts to the rape of her daughter with sorrow and anger. And by hiding the corn from the field she eventually forces Zeus, the ruler among gods, to release her offspring from Hades. However, Hades tricks Persephone to consume the seed of a pomegranate. As if by a magic spell (and indeed the Homeric narrative presents us with obvious elements of a fairy-tale tradition), the girl is now bound to live one third of the annual cycle in the Chthonian realm of the dead while being allowed to stay with her mother on Mount Olympus for the remaining time (h.Cer. 399). Thus the virgin (παρθένος) partakes in the cycle of life. And she does it by way of being a symbol in Benjamin’s sense.

<sup>223</sup> In German: “Zwei Menschen, die sich Lieben, hängen über alles an ihren Namen”, GS IV, 119.

<sup>224</sup> Whether one wants to assign significance to it or not, ancient Greek did not know of capital letters.

Not only does the form of her being contain the immediate relation between the fertility of the crops and of human beings, it also contains the relation between mortal and immortal existence, between life and death, death and rebirth. And yet, she doesn't signify anything. Her initial fate mimes death, and Demeter may be seen to react in the manner of a mother who has lost her child, but it goes without saying that Kore doesn't – is unable to – die. A *divine* maiden she will ever be. As a goddess she mimes fertility, the spring of corn, by rising from the depth of the earth, but she is not *the corn*, and she doesn't give birth *to anything*. Finally, she mimes the fate of human beings, but she is not a human being. She is an idea, a symbol, a name. In fact, she is two names. As she appears from the tradition of Homeric hymns, her mimetic 'death' is merely a transformation from the name of Kore to the name of Persephone.<sup>225</sup> 'Persephone' carries no unambiguous meaning<sup>226</sup>, but one might still suggest that the transition of names may simply indicate the changeover from a young girl to a named woman. However, to think thus is to infer a distinction between word and name that may not apply. This is what I have in mind when I refer to a symbol in Benjamin's sense.

How come, for instance, that 'Hades' is used as a name for the realm of the dead as well as for their king? Is Hades a *topos* or an *agent*? The answer is likely that he is *both*. Hades is a name by which death manifests itself in human experience as an invisible agent, transporting the breath of life (ψυχή) that was once part of the visible world into that which *cannot be seen* (allowing the etymology of Hades ("Αἰδής, *A-idēs*<sup>227</sup>) to speak, cf. Albinus, 2000, 32. n. 21). Hades is the secret, mythic name for the inexpressible. At the same time, Hades is pure expression. As a name it neither signifies a God nor a place or a Chthonian power (although such predicates may, of course, apply secondarily). As a name, however, it is all as well as none of these. The same goes for Kore. She is not just *a* girl. She is a name for *being-girl*. She is 'girl' as symbol, or as archetype, as Jung and Kerenyi would say (1985). She

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**225** Thus, Schelling, in his philosophy of mythology, sees in Persephone the female principle of being-something-else (cf. *die Möglichkeit des anders-Sein*) complementing the male principle of self-consciousness, or being-the-same, 1968, 22. Thus, the mythical figure of Persephone specifically represents the potentiality of 'becoming' (or 'Seinkönnen') what one is not already.

**226** Among the various attempts at an etymological explanation of the name (variably rendered as Perse-fone, -fassa, -fatta, cf. Janda 2000, 224), Michael Janda's suggestion, which translates it as "die das/den (immer wider) Glänzende(n) hinüberbringt/hinübererbrachte" (for short 'the returning light'), stands out as being carefully based on philological comparison of Indo-European roots, op.cit. 247. I will have to say, however, that I am disinclined to put much weight on etymology inasmuch as it involves the name (and naming) in an explanatory effort which is secondary to its expressive immediacy, see, for instance, Pl.Cra. 385b2, where the etymological meaning of a given name is involved in a play about true and false (thus, Theophilus is only a true name if it is true that the gods love the person called by that name). This is exactly what Benjamin and Heidegger would regard as an abstracting fall from the self-disclosing nature of truth.

**227** The *alpha privativum* (α-) denotes that which cannot 'be seen' (*idēs*).



reveals a *pure word* in Novalis' sense and thus only appears in the semblance of a girl. Yet, myth speaks the unspeakable in secrecy. In myth, *chaos*, the formless void, is turned into form, which, in its spellbound, petrified and mortified appearance as language, becomes able to "indicate the symbolic" (Benjamin, SW, I, 224). As a symbol of 'being girl', Kore suffers a fate by which she is transformed into 'being woman' by the name of Persephone. This looks very much like the human practice of matrimonial transition by which the young bride adopts a new name. And it is most certainly the case that the *symbol* of Kore/Persephone partakes in this rite of passage as it also alludes, without a doubt, to the rites of harvest. Be that as it may, however, the most prominent religious festival in honor of Demeter and her daughter, the Eleusinian Mysteries, was a cult in its own right. That it probably grew out of a strictly agrarian background, whatever that is taken to imply, doesn't change this fact. Unspeakable (ἀπόρητον) as it was, it didn't *signify* anything. Yet those who witnessed it became blessed (ὄλβιος) contrary to those ill-fated (ἄμορος), who didn't (h.Hom. 2.480–81). The Mysteries were pure form. They spoke without speaking. They did not try to teach (μαθεῖν) the initiates anything, as Aristotle is quoted for saying (fr. 15 Rose), but submitted them to experience (παθεῖν) the unspeakable. 'Mystikos' (μυστικός) in Greek means 'secret', not in the sense of some secret unutterable experience, but in the sense of a ritual practice that it was strictly forbidden to imitate outside of the cult setting. And this is the deep, empty secret of myth and cult, namely, that whatever the connections they manifest between various similarities, they do not signify them. They express a form of life, a way of seeing things, and a way of acting out. "But you wouldn't ask: What is the law? *That* they point is all there is to it".<sup>228</sup>

The transition in name from Kore to Perspehone is not another expression for 'growing up', 'becoming an adult', or 'getting married'. Persephone names a being-woman, a being-queen-of-the-underworld, a being-power-over-the-dead, a being-power-of-the-dead, a being-power-to-give-life (perhaps also being-power-to-take-life),<sup>229</sup> the being-an-ear-of-corn, and so on. And yet Persephone is not the name of any of these beings. She *names* them in and by herself, but she is not the name *of* *them*. Like the Corn-wolf (see above) she passes from one meaning to another, and may attain a concrete sense in one context, while another sense in another context. And "we recognize herein a familiar linguistic occurrence" (PO, 135), as Wittgenstein

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<sup>228</sup> I would like to see a similarity between this view of (religious or mystical) *expression* and the form of expression that becomes the key for Deleuze in his interpretation of Spinoza according to the question of divine names: "So that the 'Word of God' has two very different senses: an expressive Word, which has no need of words or signs, but only of God's essence and man's understanding; and an impressed, imperative Word, operating through sign and commandment", 1990, 57. Though the former may point to the latter, its meaning remains in the expression as expression.

<sup>229</sup> The etymology of *Persephoneia* as *pherein phonos* (bringing slaughter) may suggest itself (though only as a possible association), see above note 226.

says. The names of Kore and Persephone verbalize an experiential content by establishing immediate, pre-categorical relations. For Wittgenstein, this is familiar to us in our own use of language. In Benjamin's view, we are beholding a realm of correspondences, the familiar eyes which have left our surroundings as well as our language. Leaving aside the guilt-ridden relations with the victims of the past which, to a large extent, informs Benjamin's view on the abstracting emptiness of 'enlightened' language use, I think Wittgenstein is right to point out the familiarity of a non-propositional language use. Not that the denotative function of language can be reduced to it or that it necessarily conceals a redemptive potential, but it is there, in the midst of our judgments, as the failure to see what is immediately in front of us. What we lack is a surveyable representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) which "produces exactly that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'" (PI § 122). In this respect, I tend to agree with Benjamin that the way in which language unfolds by way of names in myth displays a certain lucidity which, rather because than despite of its secrecy, is absent from our abstracting use of words.

To sum up on the Greek example: The name of Kore is not an abstract expression for a young girl in general. On the contrary, it expresses a concrete meaning of *being* this girl Kore, which, by a violent intrusion into its very essence, transforms into the concrete meaning of being this woman Persephone. Eventually, Kore and Persephone are one and the same, as Demeter and her daughter are, according to Kerényi (cf. Jung & Kerényi, 1985, 136 f), and, therefore, neither the one nor the other functions merely (and not even primarily) as an instrument of identification (cf. Wittgenstein PO, 127). Rather they express *pure presence* "indicating something symbolic", as Benjamin would say. In whatever degree the frames of interpretation might have been restricted for the audience of the *Homeric hymn to Demeter*, these 'semantic' possibilities are immanently present. They are not bound within a culturally confined, or esoteric, way of representation, but also relate, beyond their mythical expression, to universal forms of being, which may, at any moment, become objects of wonder. Thus, in his essay on surrealism, Benjamin dissociates the aesthetic shock-effect from the fantasizing character of extraordinary experiences, and rather wants to elicit the occult character of their sensual representation from the level of *daily* experience (GS, II, 307). Similarly, Wittgenstein saw a similarity between the occult use of names in magic rites and our own inclinations in the daily use of language. Benjamin, however, also looked for a mimetic faculty which, in his view, has been generally suppressed by the abstracting worldview of science, while still remaining recognizable in works of art and ruins of the past. To speak in the terms of Rudolph Otto: The *tremendum et fascinosum* of the *numinous* may have vanished, more or less, in modernity, not only from religious experience and symbols, but also, if we turn to Benjamin's field of interest, from the consummation of art, owing to the post-auratic conditions of its exposition (rather than exhibition) and reproducibility. However, the possibility of "the concrete totality of experience – that is, existence [Dasein]" may still be reflected, in art as well as in religion.

In order to stick with the ‘name’ as the specific topic of this chapter, a telling example of its auratic representation in literature (as being an obvious medium for it) is found in *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (‘In Search of Lost Time’) by Marcel Proust, who, not coincidentally, enacted a noticeable influence on Benjamin. Proper names, for persons as well as places, play an important role through the whole body of the work owing to their ‘magic’ quality. The protagonist Marcel is thus in awe of the Guermantes family, not least because of the mystic sound of their name. In general, names and sensual qualities enter secret interrelations, which entice the artistic spirit of young Marcel. Thus, the simple taste of a Madeleine cookie dipped in a cup of linden-flavored tea, produces an involuntary memory of Combray, the town of his childhood years, because, as he later acknowledges, his aunt used to serve him this treat. Through a seemingly endless search for the truth-content of his unfathomable sensation, Marcel eventually realizes that it lies neither in the thing itself – the past – nor in the individual quality of his imaginary power, but in the artistic representation through which it is raised above individual contingency, sensuality and the destructive course of time. ‘The work of art’, Marcel thus concludes, ‘is the only means of regaining the lost time’. “Proust’s restorative will”, Benjamin remarks, “remains within the limits of earthly existence” (1999, 179) and, in this sense, the ‘beyond’ of religious dogma is abandoned like the ghostlike spire of the church in the memory image of Combray. Instead, Combray itself, indistinguishable from its name, has kept the aura hitherto pertaining to a holy place. Marcel is part of it, and it is part of him, both transcending the bounds of contingent existence in the artistic representation. For the same reason, Adorno saw the work of Proust as an authentic parallel to the doctrine of immortality in theology (1992, 297 f). In modernity, art and religion can preserve their shared commitment to truth only by avoiding any kind of exchange that would merely serve to *sell* a message (ibid.). Yet, the immortality of the soul is as intimately connected with a name in religion as it is in its artistic counterpart.<sup>230</sup>

In fact, in the epic tradition of ancient Greece, we come across a kind of representation which lies ambiguously between a doctrine of existential immortality and an aesthetic form of immortalization. First of all, the concept of the ‘soul’ (ψυχή), as we encounter it in Homer, does not resemble the meaning it obtains in the later use of Plato and the Christians, but is rather associated with ‘a breath of life’ which departs from the body at death.<sup>231</sup> Yet it remains an image (almost syn-

**230** I am reluctant to make ‘immortality of the soul’ a defining trait of religion, at least not without a further qualification of the semantic content of ‘immortality’ and ‘soul’. Otherwise, we would have to abstain from speaking about in religion, for instance, in relation to those secular deviations in modern theology, in which the immortality of the soul is downplayed to the point of insignificance.

**231** The ‘body’ is thus identified with the person himself (in Greek: *autos*), Il.1.4, while the *psuchē* (ψυχή) is “ein Luftartiges, Hauchartiges, im Athem des Lebenden sich Kundgebendes”, as Rohde expresses it (1925, I, 3), that fleets from the limbs of the dying, e.g., Il.16.856.

onymous, therefore, with ‘idol’ (εἶδωλον) of the departed to be remembered by the living. This doesn’t necessarily imply that the ancient Greeks around the 9th Century BCE didn’t believe in any ‘substantial’ or ‘personal’ immortality, but at least one of the most prominent voices of tradition put all the weight in the poetic image, that is, the immortality of heroic fame (κλέος), rather than in the representation of a real afterlife, which occurred only as a matter of exception. In Homeric religion (inasmuch as the reference to powers of the beyond – the daughters of Apollo – permits us to speak of religion here<sup>232</sup>), heroic fame is intimately related with the name. What seems to be remembered and immortalized is the name of the person rather than the person herself. However, this differentiation may be illegitimate from a certain point of view: as if the name was only an attribute to the person! In the context of the epics, the name clearly transcends that of a strict instrumental use. Rather, it reveals the *essence* of the person, even though the man ‘himself’ (αὐτός) is left on the battlefield as a prey for wild dogs and birds (Il.1.4). It is the essence of Achilles, among others, that comes into Odysseus’s sight at the pit of the underworld, even though the deceased are, more than anything else, frozen images of their appearance at the moment of death. In other words, a distinction between the essence of ‘a soul’ – as we, in our tradition, would tend to think of it – and the essence of remembrance may not carry any relevant meaning in Homer. It is a predicative distinction that falls short of the power of the name, or perhaps we should say, of the name behind the name, the ‘pure word’ that makes Achilles, Odysseus, Demeter, Kore, Persephone, Zeus, Hades, and all the other figures of myth, appear as essences. Yet when personal identity (*autos*), name, and soul (*psuchē*) became inseparable, as already in Pindar and Plato,<sup>233</sup> immortality became substantial in a new sense (just as the substance of everything was defined, in philosophy, according to its unchangeable nature as something ‘of its own being’ (οὐσία).

The giving of names to newborns plays a significant role in all culture and represents many functions including manifestations of adherence, to family, clan or totem. The Kore/Persephone narrative is just one example among many, representing a widespread custom of changing names according to transitions in social status (as by attaining the papacy, for instance). Names serve, among other things, to categorize. In religion, more specifically, names are divined through magic, incantation, and baptism. But can we say that there is *one* function of naming in religion which is more basic than others and which goes to reveal something essential about religion? I think not. Naming has as many functions in religion as in nonreligious contexts. Insofar as our definition of religion centers around a reference to something beyond, we *can* say, however, that naming here enters a significant double as in Nicholas Wolterstorff’s concept of ‘double agency discourse’, for instance (cf. above, 3.1). But that doesn’t

<sup>232</sup> See Detienne (1996, 39 ff) in support of this point of view.

<sup>233</sup> See especially Foucault, 2005a, 53, on this point.

imply that we have, thereby, disclosed the ontological, psychological and existential depth of naming.

In order to assess further the meaning of 'a significant double' in religious name-giving, baptism may prove to be a helpful example. In modern times, baptism has been a controversial matter, and one element in the parting of ways is the division between a Protestant and a Catholic tradition. The controversy became as heated as ever, when Karl Barth repudiated infant baptism in his *Church Dogmatics* (IV, 4) on account of the inability of the child to consciously attain faith.<sup>234</sup> In other words, he viewed baptism as an ontic transformation according to knowledge (νόησις) (cf. Barth, 2011, 92). Contrary to Barth, Gordon Lathrop takes the Protestant meaning of baptism to imply the ritual instigation of a new beginning, a becoming, rather than a conscious choice (1998, 65). For Bonhoeffer (1989, 81), baptism is nothing but a *call* (*Ruf*) to succeed Christ in a daily struggle against sin and evil. Apart from these theological differences which, of course, turn on the conception of faith, the ritual of baptism is constituted formally by a priest who, in the name of Jesus Christ, confirms the name of the child. The newborn member of the Christian society is, thereby, effectively 'categorized' as belonging to the kingdom of God. Another point which also could be made, however, is that the name of the child is rooted in the name of Jesus who (or which), according to the Prologue of John, is also the word, λόγος, present from the beginning and entering the world as the essence of God himself. Incorporating the sacrificial victim to end all victims (cf. Girard, 1987, 180), the son of God fulfills his purpose of being the savior of God's creatures. Thus, sins can be forgiven in *his name* just as the whole life of every individual, who has been *christened*, is a life in *Jesus*. If the name of Jesus represents, all else being equal, God's word of creation, reflected in his incarnated promise of salvation, then Christianity, in an Augustinian tradition (cf. *Confessiones*, Book 13), invests a cosmic power in the 'name' – not any name, of course, but the name of Jesus, the name of the beginning and end in logos, the one name that sanctifies every other name. In Christianity, the nameless God of pure being, YHWH, got a proper name only in Jesus and became knowable as did the unknown God in Athens through Paul's speech at Areopagos. But is 'Jesus' a name in the same sense as 'Kore' or 'Persephone'? What do these names tell us about religion as religion? And finally: what is the relation, if any, between these divine names and names bestowed on ordinary humans (apart from the sanctification through the name of Christ)?

Although human names may, at times, function like some jewelry hung around the neck of their possessors (as Wittgenstein remarked), it is only the divine names which are, intrinsically, objects of adoration. They address personal entities rather

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<sup>234</sup> The controversy goes back to Luther's critique of the scholastic view on the sacrament as bestowed on the child independent of the subjective faith of the child (*fides infantium*), cf. Huovinen, 1997, 52 ff.

than merely naming them. As for Jesus, one might say that by combining the name of a historical human being with the ‘mystic’ name of the beginning, he explodes the secret law of names in myth. In his name, and in his name only, the magical immediacy of worldly correspondences is dispelled and transformed into the eschatological vision of salvation. Reflecting the impact of this rupture, Benjamin also addressed the need for redemption concerning everything and everyone of the past, and yet, instead of referring to a life in Christ, he envisioned a Messianic power. Why? Was it merely because of an inclination towards Jewish thinking? Or should we rather surmise a penchant towards the nameless, the expressionless, which appeared in the midst of the religious teachings (*Lehre*) as it did in language (*Sprache*) and artistic semblance (*Schein*)? Maybe a whole spectrum of names, including those of ‘ordinary’ mortals, of religious authorities, of Muhammad, Gotama Buddha, Jesus, and, say, every divinity of myth, participates in the occult origin of the nameless as the inexpressible wonder of language, that is, a pure language of *names*: names that transcend the identity of the personal in any sense because they are nothing but that which – in language – opens up the world. This may sound as an unreserved worship of language that merely makes it a substitute for God but, in Benjamin’s eyes, this would be a false distinction. Maybe, therefore, he has got a point in regarding his philosophy of language as opening up to a philosophy of religion. At the core of this relationship lies not the instrumental purpose of the name, not even the name as a vehicle of faith and adoration in personal powers of redemption, but the name as the essence of being that dwells in the heart of language, more salient in religion than anywhere else, owing to the ‘name’ of something beyond.<sup>235</sup>

## 5.6 The Point of Relation as Relating

*We have to be in a desert. For whom we must love is absent*  
Simone Weil

In my discussion of truth-semantics (chapter 4.2–4.6), I have spoken about truth in a propositional sense as well as in a pragmatic, and admittedly rather vague, sense of use. For Benjamin the use of language is intrinsically ethical, and the fall from the concrete to the abstract use of language is, therefore, a fall from truth. Seen from the perspective of philosophical aesthetics, Benjamin finds truth in the unveiled power

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<sup>235</sup> A similar meaning of the expressive name, being the essence of God as substance, is found in Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza, the point being, however, that the philosophical force of Spinozist thinking, condoned by Deleuze, is, at the same time, a move from transcendence to immanence, 1990, 53 ff.

of *Darstellung* (representation). Yet a messianic restoration of meaning may still be called for. It is the obligation of philosophy, in this respect, to prevent the original truth from being conflated with the pure semblance (*Schein*) of its substitution, that is, the current conditions of representation (*Darstellung*). A philosophy of aesthetics (including Benjamin's favorite, literary criticism) must perform a 'redeeming critique' (*rettende Kritik*) of historical and cultural products in order to save their truth content. And 'truth content', in Benjamin's terms, can be summarized as the nonviolent accessibility of the world through the magical immediacy of correspondences, synonymous with a *pure language of names*.

However, in order to demystify Benjamin's somewhat esoteric style, I shall, on my own account, venture to rephrase his point about the concrete meaning of (linguistic) expression in more general terms.

Take, for instance, a hypothetical utterance like: "There behind the trees!" and let it serve as an answer to a question about the location of something (not designated, but apprehended by implication). The utterance is propositional and the contextual 'meaning' (*Sinn* in Frege's sense) of 'trees' is part of an information or 'reference' (*Bedeutung* in Frege's sense). The word is used, not for its own sake, but as a medium for pointing to something that it doesn't even stand for.

Another utterance: "There is a tree!" is also informative, but here the 'tree' is no longer an assisting part of the proposition. Instead, it constitutes its focal point, which means that although 'meaning' is still bound up with 'reference', it is also returned to itself, retaining something which is made present for its own sake.

A third utterance: "Tree!" is no longer propositional. There is no (linguistically implied) context, no reference. Of course, when a child, who has just learned to speak, exclaims these words in avid recognition, it counts as a reference and therefore as a proposition, syntactically inadequate as it is. Still, dissociated from any immediate context of recognized communication, a mere "tree"-utterance challenges the very concept of utterance in the first place. It represents nothing but the sound of a voice forming the word 'tree'. There is a difference, however, between some random, uninterpretable sound of a voice, and the sound of its forming the word 'tree'. It is not propositional, but it still carries interpretable meaning. The very fact that it appears out of context strips this meaning down to the nakedness of sheer expression, which is more than a sound but less than an utterance. Although the whole game of language is already present as a precondition for *understanding* the expression, as Wittgenstein might want to say, it is by itself something more than merely exemplary of an item in a terminological system; it changes from word into name, and herein lies the magic of language. In this naming, which is neither deriving nor derivative but simply intrinsic, we stand face to face with the world. In this naming expression, religion has one of its roots, not in the divine power beyond and before the tree, but in 'the tree' with its implied necessity of having been created outside its presence in language by a divine power beyond and before it (if not *in it*, as Spinoza would say – thereby turning religion into a kind of spiritual materialism).



From another point of view, Heidegger ponders, in his late courses *What is called thinking?* (*Was Heisst Denken?*), what it means to have a perception of a ‘blossoming tree’ (*blühende Baum*). What ‘takes place’ (*ereignet sich*) in our ‘placing [it] before’ us (cf. ‘Vor-stellen’, which might be translated as ‘cognizing’, ‘imagining’, yet literally means *placing before*)? Are we placed before (*gegenüberstellen*) the tree or is the tree placed before us (*sich uns vorstellt*)? (1954a, 17).<sup>236</sup> His point is that the being of the encounter, that is, the presence, or *presencing*, of the tree which makes us stand before it, can neither be located in our brain processes nor in the scientific predication of the tree itself (op.cit. 18). Yet, when scientific knowledge takes precedence of meaning, it makes a decision about what is and what is not real about the blossoming tree. Similar to Benjamin’s critique of the violence of reductive predication according to empirical properties, oblivious of immediate correspondences, Heidegger points out that it remains an unanswerable question how science, unable to perceive its own essential origin (*die Herkunft ihres eigenen Wesens*), acquires the power and the right to make these judgments (ibid.). Thus, in Heidegger’s view, it is presumptuous of science to believe it can determine *die Standort* (location) of the relation between human beings and the world (ibid.). It is as if science forgets that it is itself part of the world. And it is this forgetfulness that makes it un-thinking.<sup>237</sup> Rather, *thinking* is found, Heidegger says, in Schopenhauer’s dictum: “Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung” (‘the world is my representation, my idea’ – or perhaps rather: ‘*my having placed something before me*’ if we are to catch the drift of Heidegger’s thought in this respect, op.cit. 15). What it means is not that the tree is simply part of my mental representation, but that the very *relation* between ‘the subject’ and ‘the object’ is thought *from within the relating itself*, as it were. The two are truly placed *before one another*, and *this* is what the world is to *me*. Wittgenstein, who in his Tractarian period was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, formulated a similar thought, albeit with one significant difference (recalling Frege’s distinction between the linguistic *Gedanke* and the mental *Vorstellung*), namely that “[t]he *limitis of my language* means the limits of my world” (TLP 5.6). The difference is not yet as profound as when Wittgenstein later *thinks* language in its social instability, but it is in line with Benjamin’s view of ‘linguistic being’. In light of this partial congruence between Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Benjamin, we might say that *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*, being the

<sup>236</sup> The English version, in which the translator decides to split the German ‘Vor/Stellen’ in ‘standing’ and ‘facing’, runs: “We stand outside of science. Instead we stand before a tree in bloom, for example – and the tree stands before us. The tree faces us. The tree and we meet one another, as the tree stands there and we stand face to face with it”, Heidegger, 1968, 41.

<sup>237</sup> Heidegger introduces his course of lectures by negatively defining thinking as that which has nothing to do with science inasmuch as science does not – and cannot – think (op.cit. 4). He subsequently assures his students that by regarding science as un-thinking his intent is a not a polemical denigration (*Herabsetzung*) of science, but rather a clarification of how, in what way, thinking implicates that which takes place in a scientific explication-without-thinking, op.cit. 49.

two constitutive aspects of *re-presentation*, come together in linguistic *presence*. And it is this manifestation of a relation between man and world, still present in the name, which evaporates in the empirical rules of predication as an exhaustion of ‘reality’. Heidegger seems to regard this as implied in Nietzsche’s *thought*, uttered as a diagnosis of the times, namely: “The desert grows, and woe to him who conceals the desert within him” (Nietzsche, W II, 540).<sup>238</sup> I take it, however, that ‘the desert’ does not only for Nietzsche symbolize the estranging principle of scientific knowledge, but also the barren state of an earthly life which has for centuries been consigned to the promises of afterlife.<sup>239</sup> Yet, a similar promise, it seems, conceals itself in the scientific mastery of nature, exchanging a heavenly reward with earthly security (cf. op.cit. 536 ff). In a way, religion and science share a surreptitious agenda of transposing the immediacy of life (op.cit. 893 f), or being, expressed in pure language, to an intrinsically inadequate language of re-presentation. The enormous, not to say priceless, gain with which science has mastered the world to the advantage of human survival and comfort is, nevertheless, paid with an evacuated juncture of immediacy, a silenced world-relation. This exact *relation*, called ‘interpretation’ by Nietzsche, is anything but identical with the life-transcending values of religion. Rather, the disruption of life, the creation of a transcendent truth determined from the beginning to transcend itself (as a will to truth) takes place in the midst of religion itself,<sup>240</sup> not in a transition from religion to science.

What Heidegger wants to point out, by way of *thinking*, is that the only way to arrest the oblivion of being, is to think it, or letting it come to thought, to language. Therefore, the constitutive *thoughts* of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (that is, ‘the desert grows’, and ‘the world is my representation’), as well as those of Benjamin and Wittgenstein, should not be estimated as alternative ways of world-predication, but rather as world-relations, which implicitly as well as explicitly criticize other kinds of world-relations. This is where philosophy resembles religion, the difference being, that ‘the beyond’ now sounds from within the complicity of language’s relating to itself.

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238 “Die Wüste wächst: weh Dem, der Wüsten birgt”.

239 One may draw a parallel to Simone Weil, who obviously shares a diagnostic perspective with Nietzsche, but nevertheless reevaluates piety on this ground by urging that: “We have to be in a desert. For whom we must love is absent”, 2002, 109.

240 As Scholem, for instance, writes: “It is characteristic of Kabbalistic theology in its systematical forms that it attempts to construct and to describe a world in which something of the mythical has again come to life, *in terms of thought which exclude the mythical element*”, 1995, 35 (my emphasis).

## 6 The Condition of Habitation

### 6.1 Interrelations Between Myth and Religion

*Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil,  
Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteuere,  
Ergriffen fühlt er tief das Ungeheure.*  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*I saw a chapel all of gold  
That none did care to enter in,  
An many weeping stood without,  
Weeping, mourning, worshipping.*  
William Blake

*The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, "Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I'm going now to close it".*  
Franz Kafka

One of the problems with a philosophy of religion is the problem of having a philosophy of anything in the first place. A tension is created within the very concept of philosophy when it is supposed to speak about – if not on behalf of – a prefigured matter. In his early transition from theology to philosophy, Heidegger claimed that philosophy doesn't have any objectively established context at disposal in which the concepts that should serve to determine it can be ordered.<sup>241</sup> It goes without saying that this should in no way prevent philosophy from reflecting on religion. In fact, Heidegger's view is presented by way of introducing a lecture course on the possibi-

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<sup>241</sup> In Heidegger's own words: "Die Philosophie hat keinen objektiv ausgeformten Sachzusammenhang zur Verfügung, in den die Begriffe eingeordnet werden können, um so ihre Bestimmung zu erhalten", GA 60, 3. He then proceeds to speak of a 'factic life experience' (*faktische Lebenserfahrung*) that calls for a phenomenology (i.e., philosophy) of religion. More recently, Matthias Lutz-Bachman has claimed that philosophy of religion should not be regarded merely as a sub-discipline to philosophy; rather it has developed in relation to an indispensable moment in the effort of contemporary philosophy to found a critical concept of reason beyond the problems of a philosophy of consciousness and the paradoxes of a totalizing critique of reason, 2000, 26. I find this view of an intimate relationship between a philosophical questioning in general and the question of religion in particular far more intriguing than the conception of a philosophy of religion along the lines of 'the philosophy of art, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of psychology; and so on (cf. Murray & Rea, 2008, xii). That being said, it would take considerations of its own to determine the internal connections between philosophy as such and questions of art, science, law and psychology. This shall not occupy us here, though.

lity of a phenomenology of religion. Heidegger's specific agenda aside, I conceive of philosophy's engagement with religion as wedded to opening up prefigured notions of religion, though such reflection may, in the act, find itself plunged into the waters of doubt concerning its proper orientation. As we have seen, the concept of truth at least needs contextual qualification, if it is going to mediate an understanding of something other than empirical truth claims. To regard a pragmatic and semantic universe of religious symbolization on the premises of a truth-convention based on external realism misses something fundamental, namely the *kind of world* that results from this symbolization. That it may be judged fictional, that is, as basically violating convention T from a secularized point of view, is trivial. It would be more appropriate to regard the religious world from the point of view of the creation of a semantic and pragmatic reality in 'its own right'.<sup>242</sup> A question that emerges in this respect, however, concerns the nature of the relation between the point of view from which we speak of such 'creation' and the creation itself. In a *theory* of religious discourse, of whatever kind, this relation tends to disappear inasmuch as the theoretical concepts are supposed – explicitly or not – to be independent of the matrix they serve to explain.

In dealing with Benjamin's and Wittgenstein's views of magical immediacy as something which doesn't simply belong to the past as much as it is recognizable as an inherent inclination in our use of language, I have tried to bring an internal relation – between *explanans* and *explanandum* – to the fore. The implication of this perspective, however, is that 'explanation' is actually not the right word, if it signals some kind of disengaged objectivity. Rather, the object in view is, at the same time, *related* to philosophy as an object of orientation. What binds them together is an attempt to find their way about in the world of their own creation. This should not be confused with subjectivism, though. The cultural systems of myth, religion, science, and philosophy, are all equally embedded in a social context which makes them 'objective' at least according to the confines of that context. Whether or not this 'objectivity' transcends the specific cultural bounds (as Habermas claims contrary to Rorty) may be regarded as a matter of translation. But then again, there is no unanimous view about the criteria which makes for the possibility of translation (cf. above, chapter 5.4). My own way about it has been to draw on Benjamin's view of the name as indicative of pure language. This perspective goes together with regarding a mythical and ritual function of truth as pertaining to the power and form of *expression* rather than to judgmental criteria implied by the propositional content. It is clear, however, that Benjamin doesn't regard the truth of philosophy or art criticism as following the same criteria as that of 'mythical thought'. Rather, in order to redeem truth from semblance, philosophy reflects on the form of expression *as a form* of expression rather than as

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<sup>242</sup> One may refer, in this respect, to the eminent attempts at developing theoretical frameworks for understanding the semantics of religion, in Jeppe Sinding Jensen (2004; 2014a).

a window to transcendence. Myth and religion, as well as philosophy, are forms of conceptuality and, therefore, *work* with concepts, but contrary to myth and religion, philosophy does not realize the magic power of symbols by submitting itself to this power, but rather by conceiving of it. Religion, as Cassirer points out, may also depart from sheer myth by rising spiritually above “the world of images and signs” in which it still lives (1955, 25), yet, in acknowledgment of their metaphorical character. Phrased in Cassirer’s neo-Kantian teleological conception of history, it means that:

Although myth, language, and art interpenetrate one another in their concrete historical manifestations, the relation between them reveals a definite systematic gradation, an ideal progression toward a point where the spirit not only is and lives in its own creations, its self-created symbols, but also knows them for what they are (op.cit. 26).

I think we might agree to this diagnosis in respect of the way in which a philosophical reflection has come to interpret ‘a human reality’, but to impose on history the unfolding of a spiritual consciousness, striving towards its own realization from the beginning, may be seen as an overhauled arraying of speculative idealism. Still, philosophy, as I am able to think of it, rightly *differs* from myth, religion and art by being a retreat into concepts as being concepts.

Philosophy thus represents a *passionate* detachment – in some respects emancipating, in others perhaps tragic – but a detachment nonetheless, by way of reflecting on concepts as concepts. And if truth and semblance are foreign to myth, inasmuch as the conceptual distinction between them makes no sense, philosophy exactly emerges from *making* this distinction.<sup>243</sup> This is not to say, however, that philosophy should abstract from anything that involves the lived experience of human beings, only that this experience is always already part of a communicative conceptualization, which is the matrix that involves philosophy, understood as communicable thinking. The entanglement, yet also the attempt at differentiation, between myth, religion, and philosophical conceptualization, is brought out, for instance, in Gerschom Scholem’s characterization of Jewish mysticism, especially the Kabbalist tradition, which “strives to piece together the fragments broken by the religious cataclysm, to bring back the old unity which religion has destroyed, but on a new plane, where the world of mythology and that of revelation meet in the soul of man” (1995, 8). It is probably distinctive of (what we call) mysticism in general (and in Kabbalism in particular, op.cit. 15) to insist on the experiential importance of the inexpressible, but it is, nevertheless, of equal importance in the Kabbalist tradition, as Scholem points out, to retain the ineffable as well as mythical elements within a frame of conceptual thinking. Kabbalism is, thereby, caught in double-bind, attempting “to describe a

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<sup>243</sup> This is even confirmed, albeit ironically, in Nietzsche’s vain attempt to exchange a will to truth with a will to semblance. The irretrievable introduction of the very distinction between *Sein* and *Schein* forbids a return to a state of pure myth, if it ever existed, other than as a counterfactual fancy.

world in which something of the mythical has again come to life, in terms of thoughts which exclude the mythical element”, a contradiction, which is, however, part of its lasting success (op.cit. 35). Yet at the same time, the “dangers which myth and magic present to the religious consciousness, including that of the mystic, are clearly shown in the development of Kabbalism” (op.cit. 36). A line of development, reminiscent of Cassirer’s view, informs Scholem’s presentation of Jewish mysticism, namely, that of a progression of human consciousness from mythical to religious thinking, the latter being the first step towards autonomous philosophical conceptualization.

Whereas I find Scholem’s description of the conceptual problems of self-appropriation in Kabbalist thought convincing, I object, on Wittgensteinian grounds, to the implied linearity of intellectual progression. Rather, I find it more conceivable that human thought in general has a tendency to move (under more or less restricted conditions) to and fro between concretion and abstraction. For the sake of ideality, one may, of course, speak of myth as concrete expression, of philosophy as abstraction, and of religion as something in between, but often enough the one shows within the other as, for instance, when metaphysical concepts (such as ‘love’ or ‘death’, ‘being’ or ‘nothingness’), being pure abstractions, attains a literal sense. Yet, inasmuch as religion, even though it acknowledges a being *beyond* words, *speaks* of this being as being the ultimate reality – truth itself – it retains an inherent affiliation with myth rather than with the purely conceptualizing potential of philosophy. In actual life, in the lived experience of human beings, however, the one may likely turn into the other, abiding to no strict divisions.

## 6.2 The Philosophy of Religion in Early Heidegger

Returning to the early Heidegger and his conception of a phenomenology of religion, *lived* experience (or *Erlebnis*) actually constitutes the center of reflection. Thus he speaks of a ‘factic life experience’ (*faktische Lebenserfahrung*) as an active as well as passive attitude towards the world, and points out that viewing this experience in light of the experiential content should not prompt us to speak of this content as any ‘object’, but rather as a ‘world’, in which one lives (GA 60, 11). What is experienced – *das erlebte* – in religion, we might add, is not the object of divinities or the object of sin, but a world in which ‘divinities’ and ‘sin’ make sense. One does not live in an object, but in a world.<sup>244</sup>

Heidegger’s way of speaking about human experience as standing in an active as well as passive relation towards the world may remind us of the view emerging from the joint perspective of Cassirer and Usener and seems to bear some resemblance as

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<sup>244</sup> In Heidegger’s words: “‘Welt’ ist etwas, worin man leben kann (in einen ‘Objekt’ kan man nicht leben)”, op.cit.

well with Benjamin's and Wittgenstein's view of symbolic representations. However, this should not fool us into presupposing an underlying agreement among interwar-philosophers as to the precise relationship between human beings and the world they live in. Soon the waters would divide as between Heidegger and Cassirer, for instance, who met at a working seminar (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) in 1929 at Davos in Switzerland.

Although Cassirer showed some appreciation of *Sein und Zeit* (in which Heidegger had come to phrase the basic philosophical concern as a question of Being addressed through 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) of human existence (*Dasein*)), Cassirer nevertheless criticized Heidegger for focusing on the receptivity of human consciousness while ignoring the spontaneity by which it also *formed* a world of being (cf. Gordon, 2010, 147). Contrary to this view, Heidegger spoke of *Dasein* as a being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-Sein*), implying that Cassirer, on his part, ignored the kind of Being that even allowed human imagination to project a world of symbolic forms. In Heidegger's eyes, neo-Kantian transcendentalism was the art of reflection that had to be transcended and it had to be done by readdressing the forgotten question of Being.

The confrontation between these two, great German thinkers has many interesting aspects which the task at hand does not permit us to deal with. What matters in the immediate context is the difference, perhaps even deepened by their exchange of views, between their concepts of 'world'. For Cassirer, the world of human beings is a world which is, from the outset, conceived through the spontaneous creation of symbolic forms. For Heidegger the world of human beings is the temporal world of *Dasein* concerned with its own being. Relating to this being as a being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*), *Dasein* does not *basically* confront a world of its own making but rather realizes 'nothingness' (*Nichtigkeit*) as its immediate ground (or 'un-ground', *Abgrund*, op.cit. 199).

While Cassirer saw the dignity of mankind in the spiritual ability to transgress the conditions of mortality, Heidegger drew attention to the *need* (Not) of holding fast to a basic question that did not take its point of departure in anthropology – *but in Being* (op.cit. 118 ff; 168 ff; 186). Clearly, though, 'world' meant different things for Cassirer and Heidegger, and so did 'being'. Whereas Cassirer, referring to Schiller's poem *To Friendship* (*Die Freundschaft*), wanted to surpass (or even 'throw off') the mortal dimension of being (op.cit. 186), Heidegger strived to explicate the 'existential' (*eksistenziale*) conditions of *Dasein*'s being 'thrown in' the world (op.cit. 188). The difference couldn't be more profound.

The question in our context is where a philosophy of religion may find itself in this divide. In order to clarify this, I shall take a closer look at Heidegger's early attempts to conceive a philosophy of factic life experience as a phenomenology of religion. Heidegger points out that philosophy rises (or springs, 'entspringt') from 'faktische Lebenserfahrung' and leaps back (*springt zurück*) into it (GA 60, 8). What it means, among other things, is that neither experience itself, nor the philosophical reflection related to it, can be subsumed under the implicated categories of cognitive content (op.cit. 9). Experience involves addressing that which is experienced



and, thereby, also being addressed by it. For this reason philosophy as such transcends criteria pertaining to a mere theory of knowledge (op.cit. 10). The problem with neo-Kantianism, in Heidegger's eyes, is that it merely circumvents this premise by substituting 'the objectified world' with the process and structure of objectification pertaining to the imaginative capacity of the human subject. The result, namely that the object is referred back to the subject, leaves the nature of *obtaining* knowledge (*Erkennen qua Erkennen*) in the dark (op.cit. 11). Instead, the point of departure for a philosophical reflection on experience (including the act of obtaining knowledge) is, according to Heidegger, *the world* in a threefold sense of *Umwelt* ('environment' or 'surroundings'), *Selbstwelt* (Self-world), and *Lebenswelt* (Life-world).<sup>245</sup> It is, moreover, the interrelatedness of these worldly dimensions which leads us to acknowledge the modality (*das Wie*) of experience in a given situation, rather than the cognitive tendency of arranging them hierarchically (op.cit. 12). In other words, it is the 'relational meaning' (*Bezugsinn*) rather than the cognitive content of a factic life experience which transpires as significant for a philosophical (that is, phenomenological) reflection. However, *faktische Lebenserfahrung* as such is not engaged in the manner of its own engagement, and may even be ignorant of the shadow cast by what it brings into sight.<sup>246</sup> What matters in immediate experience is the immanent character of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) preceding any realistic as well as idealistic determination. The place occupied by significance in experience makes the latter indifferent to the *very relation* between its own experiencing and the experienced, which means that it repeatedly "*conceals* its own emerging philosophical tendency", as Kisiel neatly paraphrases Heidegger's point (1993, 156). Since experience is driven by a self-sufficient concern, it tends to lapse back into the kind of objectification that eventually aligns it with a scientific culture (ibid.). However, becoming aware of – and holding fast to – the manner (*Weise*), in which significance *becomes* significance in the world that houses it by way of a threefold dimensionality, is not a theoretical insight but a philosophical self-awareness. Hence, to look in the direction of a transcendental consciousness that forms our world is to put the cart before the horse inasmuch as such a look-out is already situated *in the world – in factic life*.

Later, in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger turns his early notion of 'captivity in life's environment'<sup>247</sup> into *Dasein* and *Sein-zum-Tode*. And confronted, in 1929, with the 'static' view of symbolic forms in Cassirer's 'theoretical' philosophy, he emphasizes the *existential mode of time* by which *Dasein* relates to its own being by way of *Sorge*. What is

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<sup>245</sup> Although Heidegger undoubtedly uses the concept of life-world in line with the phenomenological way in which Husserl, his teacher, uses it, the embryonic intimations of a departure from phenomenology understood as a philosophical science begin to show.

<sup>246</sup> The impact of this thought is clearly recognizable in Derrida's deconstructive method as well as in Foucault's descriptions of knowledge through difference.

<sup>247</sup> "Ich bin [...] immer der Umwelt verhaftet", as Heidegger says, ibid.

important for Heidegger, already in 1920, however, is that the worldly form (*weltliche Charakter*) of experience is neither located in objectivity nor in subjectivity – that is, neither in theoretical reflection nor in an inner perception (*innere Wahrnehmung*) – but in the form of our being, which, at this point, is conceived as *facticity*.

Habermas, who acknowledges the powerful impact Heidegger's thinking has had on his own generation, buys into a sociological version of the concept of life-world (*Lebenswelt*), and his three-world differentiation between objectivity, intersubjectivity and subjectivity is clearly reminiscent of Heidegger (though it also draws on a comparable, and somewhat closer, differentiation in Kant, Weber, and Piaget, for instance). Though Habermas eventually directs a relentless critique against Heidegger for embracing a dangerous amount of irrationalism (not unlike Cassirer's objection, but from principles of communicative rationality rather than Kantian principles of transcendentalism), he keeps within the perspective of concrete existence, or facticity, in a way that still seems reminiscent of Heidegger's determinate turn towards finitude (*Endlichkeit*). For Habermas, the tripartite division of our world is thus not to be understood ontologically, along the lines of Popper's *Three World Model*, for instance, but pragmatically according to criteria of validity and modes of speech acts (cf. Albinus, 2013b). My hunch is, however, that this 'theoretical' transformation of worldly conditions into criteria of reaching a communicative consensus (*Einverständnis*), however pragmatically conceived these criteria might be, would be foreign to Heidegger's way of thinking, early as well as late. Whether it presents Heidegger or Habermas with the greatest philosophical challenge is a question I shall postpone for now. What occupies me in the present context is rather the way in which we might conceive of the 'world' of human beings that are engaged in the act of making 'this world' a physically as well as symbolically livable habitat.

The crucial word in this respect, a word that bears all the connotations of existential hope and freedom, as well as danger and anxiety, related to a human dwelling in the world, is 'home', and my thesis is that religion is the exceptional realization of the interrelation between the need for having a home in the world and *making the world* a home. As much as this notion is in line with Thomas Tweed's theory of religion as an institutionalized way of 'crossing and dwelling', it also departs from it in turning the blind eye to the geographical perspective that informs his concept of dwelling. I can easily agree to the way in which Tweed uses the term 'dwelling' involving "three overlapping processes: mapping, building, and inhabiting" and taking these to refer "to a confluence of organic-cultural flows that allows devotees to map, build, and inhabit worlds" (2006, 82). Thus dwelling, in a religious context, Tweed says, "is homemaking" (*ibid.*). While wholeheartedly condoning this basic point, I shall not follow Tweed along the geographical lines of territory and migrating travels. The merits of this perspective, notwithstanding (though they are theoretically rather than philosophically engaged), the present view of habitation does not intend to 'leave home' in order "to theorize", which is the objective for Tweed quoting James Clifford (*op.cit.* 1) in this respect, but I rather want to perceive of religious home-making

from the conditions of home-making *as such* – already *at home*, as it were, in the juncture between the conditionality of being human and the ramifications of history and culture. More specifically, I shall center on the issue of home-making as a way of dealing with the strangeness, the ambiguity, of the world, surfacing, for instance, in the contrasts between happiness and unhappiness, human finitude and the infinite, being and nothingness. In my attempt to elaborate this thesis conceptually, I shall draw not only on Heidegger, but on Heidegger in relation to Cassirer, or to put it differently, I shall enter the treacherous zone of ambiguity between spontaneous world-creation and receptive world-captivity.

If philosophy is world-engagement by way of clarification and conceptualization, one might say, from a philosophical point of view that we disown myth from our position in a world which is no longer determined by it. It is no sheer coincidence that ‘myth’ in daily language often refers to an unfounded opinion. Of course, it would be unscholarly to make an immediate connection between this modern connotation of the term and the world-projecting force of mythical thought among present day tribes or cultures of the ancient world. But it still says something about profound differences in worldview.<sup>248</sup> My point is that the definition of myth as, for instance, a way of holistic and symbolic world-making that precludes external criteria of rectification, is at the same time a confrontation between two worldviews, the modern and the pre-modern. The said definition is not simply and independently true, but only true in the light of this worldly – or cultural – interaction.<sup>249</sup>

If science is world-engagement by way of testable objectification, exploration and explanation, it has to trust its own standing in the world to be unshakable (in an almost biblical sense); not that it knows everything in advance, of course, but that it knows exactly how to proceed in order to *gain knowledge*. The world of science is, paradoxically, inhabited and uninhabited at the same time. Inasmuch as science knows its way about in the world, it inhabits it, but inasmuch as it incessantly traverses unknown territories, it explores a world still uninhabited by knowledge. What this paradox reveals is a split between the world of knowledge and the world in which knowledge becomes knowledge. Let us remind ourselves, once more, about Wittgenstein’s way of contrasting ‘people of today’ with ‘the ancients’ as regards their faith in ‘something inviolable’ (cf. above, 5.4.). The difference Wittgenstein points to is that for science this faith is bound up with the conviction that everything is, in princi-

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**248** Thus Nancy holds that our culture has dedicated itself to a reduction which can be expressed in “the maxim ‘Myths are fables’, that is, they are illusory and untruthful inventions”, 2013, 70.

**249** Nancy goes yet further in claiming that “we have come to recognize now that we cannot have any access to what we have designated as the world of myth” (1997, 6). I would agree to this statement if it were to be modified with something like ‘independent access’, but, of course, Nancy would regard such apparently innocent qualification as the very reintroduction of a belief in a form of reality-depicting or ‘sense of the world’ which, to him, seems irretrievably lost. It is far from clear, however, from what point of view, he is able to defend or sustain the totality of this claim.

ple, explainable, whereas in myth and magic (among the ancients), the powers (God and Fate) are simply named (cf. ‘they have a clear and acknowledged terminus’). For science the world is, in principle, homogenous, whereas for religion (broadly speaking) it is heterogeneous or dyadic (cf. Doležel, 1998, 128 ff).<sup>250</sup> Both science and religion are ways of coping with, and coming to terms with, the powers of their respective worlds, but whereas the one-dimensionality, as well as the theoretical and practical success, of the scientific world-relation encourages ‘science’ to regard its own power transparently revealed in nature, the two-dimensionality of the religious world-relation (including myth and magic) compels ‘religion’ to contemplate the relation itself, expressed as communication – between humans and non-human powers (including the rather *trans-human* power of ancestors). This means, for instance, that science may turn its gaze upon the phenomena of myth, magic, and religion, without paying any real notice to its own kind of engagement, or rather: since science is generally built on the conviction that the world is what it is regardless of any human stance towards it, and that the right theory will inevitably reflect this objective reality, the underlying engagement becomes cognitively redundant. It does not mean, however, that it is insignificant. From a philosophical point of view it rather carries all the impact of meaning-making. If, on the contrary, one thinks of ‘a causal explanation’, even a complex one, as a case of ‘everything explained’ (cf. Wittgenstein TLP 6.371–372), then one suffers from an illusion of a transparency *which is not of this world*. Seen from within the limitations of our worldly being, however, the *significance* of world-engagement in the theoretical objectification of ‘religion’ lies in its being a relation to (a world which is) a relation (to a world). It may be for such reason that Heidegger, in his methodological introduction to the phenomenology of religion, chose to speak of a religious life experience by way of a ‘formal indication’ (*Formale Anzeige*) (GA 60, 62–65). Instead of aiming to represent the significant content of experience (the ‘lived-through’, *das Erlebene*), he rather points to the significance of something *obtaining significance* in religious life experience, and, accordingly, its ‘how’ (*wie*). The phenomenological explication thus consists in holding the relational meaning (*Bezugsinn*) in suspense by warding off the tendency of factic life experience to lapse back into ‘objectivity’ (op.cit. 64). Contrary to classifying ‘religious meaning’ according to a semantic system, the methodical point of ‘the formal indication’ is to indicate how the experiential relation to the experienced content (*Gehalt*) stands to its own fulfillment or enactment (*Vollzug*) in the factic (*faktische*) situation of life. Schematically, a phenomenological explication, according to Heidegger, consists in the reconstruction of 1) an original ‘what’ (*was*), i.e., the content of experience, 2) an

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<sup>250</sup> As Doležel writes from the point of view of narrative modalities: “All modal systems have the potential for constructing dyadic worlds. The prime dyadic structure of the alethic [i.e., truth-conditional] modality is the mythological world, constituted by a combination of the natural and the supernatural world”, op.cit. 128 f.

original 'how' (*wie*) of their relation (*Bezug*), and 3) an original 'how' of their realization (*Vollzug*) (op.cit. 63). The implications of this *Vollzug*, barely translatable by one English term, are crucial in that they direct us to the kind of world-engagement we are dealing with. At the same time, this 'dealing with', cast in the mold of its own facticity, draws towards a conclusion (*Vollzug*) within another world-engagement. A philosophical reflection homes in at the contact-point between the two, that is, the relational meaning of a relational meaning, as in a spell of opposed mirrors. The question is whether we have any means at our disposal for not ending up with pure 'relationality' (not to be confused with relativity) which stands the risk of being ineffable. Heidegger, at any rate, abruptly broke off his methodological considerations, and as the saying goes, it was because of the increasing impatience of methodologically disinclined students (op.cit. 339; Kisiel, 1993, 150). Be that as it may, after a short break he took to the concrete reading of Pauline letters.

By way of introducing this text-interpretation, he follows up on the methodological musings by suggesting the 'naïve' foothold (*Beschränkung*) of the present enterprise to be a conceivable context of understanding (*einen verständlichen Zusammenhang*). Thus, the point of view is an already historical relation (with respect to its own enactment, *Vollzug*) to a historical context of possibilities for a factic, religious life experience (op.cit. 75). What makes this experience available is the matrix of 'consciousness' (*Bewusstsein*), rather than any historical objectification (in the form of transmitted utterances and objectified terms). Heidegger's concern to avoid 'objectification' thus sidetracks the already objectified medium of interrelation, namely translatable 'language' (op.cit. 85), and aims directly at the possibility of (philosophically) reenacting the original relational meaning, that is, to 'experience the matter as it originally emerged' (*den Gegenstand selbst in seiner Ursprünglichkeit zu erfahren*) (op.cit. 76).<sup>251</sup>

The way in which Heidegger speaks about anticipations (*Vorgriffe*) of the philosophical approach (*Betrachtung*) later finds a strictly hermeneutical interpretation in Gadamer. In his *Truth and Method* (1960) we can easily recognize several of Heidegger's points as, for instance, concerning the inescapable prejudice (accompanying any interpretative engagement) that has to be taken into account and challenged in the process of the engagement itself; the bracketing of conditions belonging to an entirely personal life experience; the initially undecided conception of the matter

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<sup>251</sup> Thus he avers that the language which clothes our approach to the matter is anything but original (cf. "Die Sprache der Sachbetrachtung ist nicht ursprünglich, op.cit. 85), whereas the factic life experience contains an original conceptuality (*Begrifflichkeit*), from which our customary view derives. Although Heidegger offers no positive method in respect of how to turn this conceptual relationship around (*Umwendung in der Begrifflichkeit*), as it were, he regards the condition of possibility for the phenomenological explication to bring about its own enactment (*Vollzug*) in grasping the relational meaning (*Bezugsinn*) of the original conceptuality, that is, the way in which this conceptuality comes to mean something in the phenomenological explication.

which only takes form in an actual encounter with and reenactment of the initially unfamiliar historical facticity (GA 60, 84 f). The main difference shows in Gadamer's view of the temporal process of understanding as redeemed by the matter (*Sache*) itself, conditioned, not by the medium of consciousness, but by language. Heidegger himself had, in the meantime, exchanged 'consciousness', with *Dasein*, and if the precise relationship between being and language was still somewhat equivocally presented in *Sein und Zeit* (1927),<sup>252</sup> he makes it clear, in his *Letter on Humanism* (1946), that the question of language goes to the heart of the matter as it is 'the house of Being' (2004, 313).<sup>253</sup> Gadamer, on his part, also borrows directly from the later Heidegger by calling the event of reaching an understanding in the temporal circle of interpretation a 'happening of truth' (*Wahrheitsgeschehen*).

What is of interest, here, however, is rather the problem that the early Heidegger grabbles with, and which is not so much directed at reaching a certain understanding than as at the matter of reenacting the original life experience, the ultimate purpose of which is to maintain the philosophical view within its own facticity. The carrying through (*Vollzug*) of this relational engagement is not determined by the matter (*Sache*) as such, but by a living-through (*Erleben*) of the original experience, namely that which Heidegger expresses – in terms highly reminiscent of Dilthey – as an empathic experience (*Einfühlung*) of the original historical situation (op.cit. 85). Contrary to Dilthey, however, Heidegger abandons the cognitive and theoretical (*Erkenntnistheoretische*) ambition and takes pains not to isolate the 'what' of the matter from the 'how' of reliving it. In other words, what really matters for Heidegger is the experiential implications of the 'how'. The 'distressed concern' (*Bekümmern*), later rephrased as 'Sorge' in *Sein und Zeit*, is not basically to be understood on account of what it is anxiously concerned *about*, but rather on account of this concern itself as a world-relation within the confines of mortal existence. Thus, in his reading of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, Heidegger formally indicates the Christian religiosity as a living-through of temporality.<sup>254</sup> Paul, who finds himself in a world without a secured order of its own, admonishes the community in Thessaloniki to 'stay awake' in expectation of the parousia (reappearance of the Messiah). Only by living 'in service of God' (δουλεύειν θεῷ) does one "know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night" (1 Thes. 5,2, cf. GA 60 112). However, an objectifying attitude<sup>255</sup> does not apply to 'time' and 'world', in this respect. That is, neither the 'when' (*Wann*) of the return nor the world of 'security' (*Sicherheit*), which is, in its own sense, prom-

<sup>252</sup> See, for instance, Lafont, 1994, 29–32.

<sup>253</sup> Even later, in 1950, he expresses the fundamentality of language in the sentence 'Die Sprache spricht' (1971, 12) [*language speaks*], which is not translatable without losing the direct relation between substantive and verb, the significance of which is obviously, for Heidegger, transcending that of a mere pun.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. "Die christliche Religiosität lebt die Zeitlichkeit", GA 60, 104.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. 'objektiv-einstellungsmässig', op.cit. 105.



ised by this return, can be understood through objective categories. They can only be indicated as a 'world' and a 'time', the being (or referential 'is') of which springs from the factic life experience of 'I am' (op.cit. 92).<sup>256</sup> The 'time' of factic life has to be inferred from its 'context of realization' (*Vollzugszusammenhang*) in the factic world (*faktische Welt*) which is the *non-I-am* (op.cit. 91). In the same vein, the time of waiting (for the parousia) is nothing like an objective time estimate, but rather an exchange of an earthly insecurity with the security of faith, *as if not* (ὥς μή) living an uncertain and troubled existence (op.cit. 117). Therefore, Christians who have wives shall live as if they did not have them (op.cit. 120); then, nothing will be taken from them. This appears (in objectifying terms) to be the temporal situation of their factic life. And it implies that the situation cannot, in the end, be safely projected into the matrix of consciousness alone, since the "term 'situation' applies strictly speaking" only "to this factic context of actualization", as Kisiel rightly points out (1993, 181). Heidegger fully realizes the difficulty of 'placing oneself in' (*Sich-hinein-Versetzen*) this situation, which must not be confused with 'phantazising oneself into' it (*Sich-hinein-Phantazieren*), but requires 'a real and authentic enactment' (*ein eigentliches*<sup>257</sup> *Vollziehen*, GA 60, 100). Thus, in the end, the time-world experience of Paul cannot be known objectively, but only realizes itself in the original affliction (*vollzieht sich ἐν θλίψεσιν*, op.cit. 121).<sup>258</sup> This, however, can only be formally indicated.

We will have to make a difficult decision, here. Either we take Heidegger to imply that one can only come by a real understanding, philosophically speaking, by personally actualizing a relational meaning, which means that everything already said about the world of Paul only serves to indicate this condition (meaning that the historical reference has no objective standing), or we take Heidegger to imply that by understanding (objectively) the constitutive importance of original life-experiential conditions, we can merely indicate the 'structure' of Pauline life-experience. I am inclined to think that Heidegger may have had the more radical point of the first implication in mind (though he may unwillingly lapse, time and again, into the latter). If

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256 "Das Problem ist der Ursprung der Seinsbegriffe; das prädikative *ist* der theoretischen Explikation entspringt aus dem ursprünglichen 'ich bin', nicht umgekehrt", op.cit. 92. Although I shall not make a case of it here, I tend to find Heidegger's prioritization of 'I am' strained. How could there ever be an 'I am' without or before an 'it is'? Experiencing – or expressing – one's own being is inextricably bound up with experiencing – or implicitly expressing – the being of something else. By still holding on to this view in *Sein und Zeit* and tracing the Parmenidean ἔστιν back into an I (Parmenides) who thinks (compare Aristotle, *De an.* 431b21), Heidegger aims to track the givenness of Being through the individual Being-there (*Dasein*), 1993, 14. As I see it, we will have to distinguish between the factic life experience, or *Dasein*, of Parmenides and the condition of possibility for expressing ἔστιν in the first place. Eventually, Heidegger himself came to choose the latter, when he 'turned' to Being (and language) itself (as encapsulated in the archaizing concept of *Seyn*).

257 It probably goes without saying that for Heidegger the word 'eigentlich' carries the double meaning of 'real' and 'one's own' (authentic).

258 I take the Greek lettering to denote this 'originality'.



so, however, the content of 'religious experience' is destructed in pure philosophical self-engagement with the 'how' of factic life experience. Moreover, the question as to why it is exactly Christian religion which is taken up as the possibility of a philosophical conception (*philosophischen Erfassung*) becomes, as Heidegger admits, a difficult question (op.cit. 124). What matters, he says, is the way in which the meaning of history for us comes to mean that objectivity (*Objektivität*) of 'the historical' as such (*das Geschichtlichen 'an sich'*) disappears. The object of understanding is thus nothing but the relational meaning (*Bezugsinn*) in indicated fulfilment (*Vollzug*), and since the past is barred from repeating itself, it can only be satisfied through the relational meaning with which a historical past concerns us in our own historical situation – involving our own historical emergency (*Not*). What it comes down to is, therefore, facticity *relating to itself*, the 'how' of our life-engendered understanding, which is always an enactment in a world thereby enacted. Although this *cura-structure*, better known in its systematically presented form in *Sein und Zeit*, expressed as *Sorge*, only finds its preliminary (or, to be more precise; *insecure*) formulations in Heidegger's reading of Pauline letters, it remains clear that the objective of his phenomenology of religion is not directed towards a better understanding of religion as an historical object, but towards a deeper realization of our engagement with it.

The point of this philosophical concern finds its most poignant expression, as already indicated, in his concept of *destruction* (*Destruktion*). The history of religions thus only contributes to a phenomenology of religion by way of submitting the material for destruction (op.cit. 78)! The goal of destruction is not, however, to eliminate the object of concern, but rather to arrest the 'falling' (*abfallende*) tendency of factic life experience, to hold fast to the inescapable condition of original, factic concern as such. Heidegger therefore uses the same 'method' of destruction in his reading of philosophical works, his general attempt being to redeem the self-obscuring nature of facticity – later rephrased as a forgetfulness of Being – from the object-oriented, falling tendency of human cognition, prominent in the scientific ambition of philosophy since Plato.

What I find most important in Heidegger's early attempt to address the question of facticity (as well as later of Being), with respect to our present *concern* with religion is the way in which he turns the gaze away from the content of belief and towards the conditions of believing, though I can only make sense of these conditions through some, at least preliminary, kind of objectification. Moreover, I find that such objectification creeps in in Heidegger's explication of Pauline world-engagement as well, despite his attempts to keep it strictly within a 'relational meaning' (*Bezugsinn*). Yet stating, as he does, that 'the authentically real' (*das Eigentliche*) is absent in the explication of a formal order (*Schema*) of experience (op.cit. 95) is quite different from claiming that *this order* can itself only be indicated through the fulfilment of a relational meaning. To go this far would face the risk of being self-refuting. The probably un-Heideggerian alternative would be to admit a referential matrix of understanding which presents at least a starting point for revising the implied concepts of

original historical experience. Otherwise, history becomes entirely fictional, which might have been part of what Benjamin found offensive in Heidegger. The referential matrix adopted by Benjamin, as presented above, was language: not *a language* spoken along the monotonous steps of development according to a homogenous time and the empirical world-denotation, but *pure* language as revealed, counterfactually, by naming. That is, a language of remembrance. Yet in order for remembrance *to be* remembrance, someone or something has to persevere as *an object* of recollection. It is thus in their attitude towards the committing objectivity of the past, that Benjamin and Heidegger stands farthest apart.

Be that as it may, the conditions of factic life experience, as Heideggers verbalizes them, are bound up with *the facticity of the situation*, that is, our worldly ‘captivity’ (later called the *thrownness* of *Dasein*). Rather than merely attempting to understand religion as a form of belief, Heideggers admonishes us, in broad terms, to take proper account of the basic conditions of finitude, the fragility and vulnerability of having to have a ‘home’ in a world of insecure life prospects. If human cultures manage to create a shimmering universe of strange symbols, it is because they find themselves in a strange world. To regard the laws of nature as a way of ‘coming home’, securing a path to reality as it always was and always will be, is, in Heidegger’s as well as Benjamin’s terms, a ‘fall’ from original being, a turning away from the ‘familiar gaze’ of the surroundings, a familiarity, however, which is not necessarily comforting, but rather an immediate, acknowledged confrontation with the harsh conditions of mortal being.

Karen Armstrong’s biography of (Gotama) Buddha may serve to illustrate this point. First of all, the young Siddhatta Gotama was said to leave his ‘comfortable home’ in Kapilavatthu in order to find the true core of being, a gesture that thus seems to represent “an awakening of the human spirit” (to use Wittgenstien’s expression) or a reaction to the falling tendency of *Dasein* (to speak with Heidegger). However, Gotama’s resulting encounter with ‘nature in the woods’ was anything but idyllic: “If a deer approached or if the wind rustled in the leaves, he recalled later, his hair stood on end” (2000, 13). The ‘familiar gaze’ that looked upon him had become estranged by the dullness of an ordinary life. His ‘going forth’ (ritualized in *pabbajja*) was thus a move away from ‘home’, understood as domesticity, in the attempt to embrace a new and open existence of ‘homelessness’ (op.cit. 3 ff). Yet, the self-chosen insecurity of living *as-if-not* having a home in the world (especially characteristic of the Axial age) may exactly be regarded as seeking to rediscover (or reinvent) the *world-as-home*, albeit in a religiously transformed (or inverted) sense.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Hans Penner has pointed out, moreover, that the “relation ‘householder – renouncer’ is the basic definition of Buddhism; although they are in opposition to each other, they are also bound to each other, and it is their relation to each other that defines them”, 2009, 3 (cf. 45 f; 73, for mythical examples of this). However, after his initial illumination the Buddha-to-be realizes the emptiness of the

### 6.3 The Consuming Nature of Myth

Contrary to Heidegger during the early twenties, Benjamin aimed, in the same period, to retract the prerogative of consciousness by speaking of ‘linguistic being’ (*Sprachliches Sein*), as we have seen. This is an important move that also Heidegger was to take in his later works, important in the sense that it questions the differentiation between the original conceptuality, that is, the conceptuality of original life experience, and the conceptuality of, say, revelation, that is, in the form of a linguistic opening of the world.<sup>260</sup> The maturing predominance of this perspective, however, may be seen as resulting in the return of experiential content as an already (linguistically) objectified concern. Yet it should not be understood in a theoretical sense. The ‘return’ is nothing but the realization of the always already present conditions of language as the expression of our social being. That the individual *Dasein* is concerned about the possibilities of its own being (‘*Sein-können*’) towards death, as Heidegger expresses it in *Sein und Zeit*, is already integrated in its being together with others, that is, the ‘*Mitsein*’ of *Dasein* (SuZ § 26). The profound solitude of being ‘there’, irreplaceably on one’s own, is anything but a solitary condition. It is shared by all mortal beings and therefore communicable. Myth and ritual communicate it (as the individual ‘going forth’ is communicated, for instance, by the *pabbajja*). But they communicate it by dissolving it, by creating the world as a home in which each individual is anything but alone. In fact, we may be inclined to think of our real engagement with myth as an ongoing battle against its consuming powers.

By securing individuality as Odysseus did (in Adorno’s reading of Homer’s *Odyssey*), while leaving the mythical part of his being to the name of *Oudeis* (‘Nobody’), the Enlightenment has repeated, in secular terms, what Christianity has always taught us, namely, that in order to hold fast to ourselves, in light of the only true God (reflected in pure reason), we will have to resist the world of dark impulses, alluring, yet infective and demonic powers that call out to our lust and imagination. In terms

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‘Self’ and accordingly the futility of continuing to build ‘a house’ (i.e., a body) in the chain of births: “I have run through the course of many births looking for the maker of this dwelling and found him not; painful is birth again and again. But now I see you builder of the house, and you will not build this house again. All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed, the mind set on destruction of all attachments has attained the extinction of all desire”, quoted by Penner, op.cit. 37.

**260** Thus, in 1950, Heidegger explicitly dissolves ‘*Der Mensch spricht*’ in ‘*Die Sprache spricht*’ and refers to the view that ‘speaking’ (*Sprechen*) should not be understood on account of a human capacity alone, but in the sense “that the word of language has a divine origin” (*das Wort der Sprache sei göttlichen Ursprungs*, GA 12, 12). Moreover, that he takes the question of origin to imply an attempt to free language from the chains of ratio-logical explanation (*rational-logischen Erklärung*) as well as to avoid the restriction of a mere logical explanation of language (*die Schranken der nur logischen Beschreibung der Sprache*, ibid.) also correlates, as far as I can tell, with Benjamin’s interest in the Kabbalistic view of language.

of Enlightenment reason, this pious concern underwent but a slight transformation into securing human and personal autonomy, that is, the transparency of will which has, perhaps, been kept in store since Socrates. The price paid, however, is that the immediate response to the profound strangeness of the world has been lost. Instead of creating the world as a home, we have created a home in ourselves, in the faculty of reason, driven by a will to truth which inevitably disenchant the environment.<sup>261</sup> A wedge is forced between the 'Selbst-Welt' and the 'Umwelt', a human attempt to gain control which eventually defeats a mythical orientation by reinstating the 'subject' as an 'object' in a 'homogeneous', but lifeless, reality (cf. Adorno, 1969, chapter 1). A comparable critique of modernity is found in the late Heidegger's view of technology as a scrupulous exploitation (*Vernutzung*) of natural surroundings resulting in a loss of the world as a whole (*Gesamtzusammenhang*). As a countermove, Heidegger pointed to the 'Fourfold' (*Das Gevierte*), a co-existence of earth and sky, mortals and immortals, a world in which humans were to dwell conscientiously.

As a cultural inclination of modernity, however, the exotic fascination with myth, which is also detectible in Heidegger's late thoughts, is not, in actual fact, a wish to return to the state of a living world, but rather a longing for extending the experiential world of the individual subject. The assertiveness of subjectivity, and individuality, comes with a price. The feeling of being estranged from the world reflects the solitude of individuality as being the center of meaning, that is, of no longer being able to locate a world of meaning, a context larger than oneself, in which one is only part of a whole.<sup>262</sup> By this I do not want to say that the mythical world was an idyllic one; far from it. It follows from the perspective, laid out above, that it was, first of all, consuming in a way that might even, by today's standards, be regarded as something like a cultural psychosis. The recognition of fate was no comfort<sup>263</sup> as much as it was a brutal experience of *meaning*, an overwhelming, threatening as well as promising,

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**261** As a matter of fact, the spiritual techniques of yoga and Buddhism could be seen as similar ways of creating an *internal* 'home' by way of self-control, thus downplaying the religious (or mythical) interpretation of the surrounding world. Although these self-mastering practices stand in complete contrast to the Enlightenment concentration of reason and theoretical justification, they nevertheless show a similar desertion of an *imaginative* mythical attitude. While the ascetic and spiritual practices of the so-called Eastern 'religions' still bear many prominent features of being 'religious' in the sense of the present study (i.e., as being framed in light of something beyond), they also show secularizing elements by being, first and foremost, *techniques* of spirituality.

**262** The British philosopher of religion John Hick thus regards the essence of religion as the transformation of human existence "from self-centeredness to Reality-centredness" (1989, 36 ff). However, this characterization seems to imply a conception of individuality (cf. self-centeredness), which may rather be seen to follow in the wake of (or the decline of) religion than to presuppose it.

**263** If anyone, Nietzsche knew this, and he thus quoted the daemonic folk wisdom of the Silenus, who in response to King Midas' interrogation about the most desirable thing of all mankind declares: "Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you no to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside of

significance of everything.<sup>264</sup> Even the imminent risk of death, the realization of life's shortness and the volatility of luck, is meaningful in the sense that it belongs to a living order of things.

From its foothold in the security of scientific knowledge and the comfortably respected limits of the self, the modern subject may want to taste the wonders of this 'original' experience, to relive it, as in a theatre, but it would not, less it surrenders to a bewildered state of mind, want to *be in it*, consumed by its violent truth. As I understand the radicalness of early Heidegger's methodical position, he wants us to realize such depth of factic life experience, the same depth that Wittgenstein speaks of in relation to magic. There is no soliciting objectivity of the world which is able to overcome it. What the quest for objectivity does is merely to make us look past it.

## 6.4 To Be or Not to Be at Home

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger returns to the duality of security and insecurity in an inverted sense. Whereas in his reading of Paul's address to the Thessalonians, he formally indicated a concrete relation between security and insecurity by picturing Christians as living an insecure life *as if* living in the security of the second coming, he now, 6 years later, turns to the general way in which a life lived in the enclosed security of daily undertakings (*alltäglichen Besorgens*, 1993, 189) rests upon the ontic condition of *insecurity*. The life of 'everybody', that is, "das Aufgehen im Man" (op.cit. 184), is intimately, albeit not expressly, threatened (*bedroht, wenngleich unausdrücklich*) by uncanniness – *Unheimlichkeit* – that is, by a feeling of being *not-at-home*.<sup>265</sup> The state of uneasiness or disquietude (*Unruhe*), which may occur under the most familiar circumstances,<sup>266</sup> has its very root, ontologically speaking, in the worldly conditionality (*Befindlichkeit*) of *Dasein*.<sup>267</sup> To find oneself really and uniquely (cf. *eigentlich*) present (*da*) in the world as thrown (*geworfen*) is at the same time (in

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your grasp: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you – is to die soon", Nietzsche, 1993, 22.

**264** For the young Nietzsche, this significance were to be found in realizing that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*", 1993, 32. It goes without saying that he thereby speaks on behalf of *the myth*, rather than from a point of view internal to myth itself. However, Nietzsche may, at the same time, have stroke a cord representative of the power of meaning pertaining to collective story-telling, the 'totalizing power of the 'savage mind'', as Habermas calls it, 1984, 45 (= 1981, I, 76) referring to Lévi-Strauss.

**265** Cf. "Unheimlichkeit meint [...] das Nicht-zuhause-sein", op.cit. 188.

**266** Cf. "Die Angst kann in den harmlosesten Situationen aufsteigen", op.cit. 189.

**267** As Benjamin writes on his essay on surrealism, "histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious (*rätzelhafte*) side of the mysterious (*Rätzelhafte*) takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery (*Geheimnis*) only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday", SW, 2/1, 216.

accordance with the corresponding *Entwurf*) to realize in angst (*Angst*) the ‘being-possible’ (*Möglichsein*) of one’s own being-in-the-world, that is, to face the world as world (op.cit. 187 f).

Contrary to fear which is a reaction to something that concretely endangers an inner-worldly security, angst, is, therefore, an ‘existential’ (*existenzial*) mode of realizing the fundamental insecurity of being-in-the-world as such. What happens in the breakdown of the familiar, therefore, is that *Dasein* is arrested in its falling tendency, turned towards itself, i.e., singularized (*vereinzelt*), in its being not-at-home (*Unzuhause*, op.cit. 189–91).<sup>268</sup> In the derived – inauthentic or un-owned (*uneigentlich*) – world of ‘Das Man’, we are ‘at home’ in the ordinary sense of belonging to a family, and, broadly speaking, of belonging to a familiarized world of culture. Yet, as singularized being, *Dasein*, we are uncannily (*unheimlich*) submitted to nothingness as the ground of being, an abyss, that is, an *un-home*. As Feuerbach once said: “Finitude is nothing but an euphemism for nothingness” (*Endlichkeit ist nur ein Euphemismus für Nichtigkeit*, 1978, 43). The object of angst is, therefore, ‘nothing’. “Angst reveals the Nothing” (*Die Angst offenbart das Nicht*), as Heidegger phrases it in *What is Metaphysics?* (2004, 112). What looms in the darkness opened up by angst is not a thing of this world, but rather the world as a thing (not entirely unlike the unbearable presence of ‘la chose’ in Lacan), that is, the intrusive presence of that which cannot be fathomed or protected against. In the dark one sees ‘nothing’, and yet the world is never felt more present, more ‘there’ (1993, 189). The tendency to evade this condition of homeless insecurity, as it were, by way of ‘seeking security’ in daily matters is what constitutes the fall of *Dasein*, whereby each of us seeks shelter in the anonymity of ‘Das Man’, corresponding more or less to philistines in Kierkegaard’s sense. As against this inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*), angst is the ‘existential’ (*existenzial*) call for authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), which is but another expression of the irreplaceable singularity of *Dasein*’s *Sein-können*, namely, the Being-toward-Death (*Sein-zum-Tode*), owned by each of us.

The uniqueness of facticity in early Heidegger, where the concretely historical still plays a role in the concept of historicity, thus takes a generalized form in *Sein und Zeit* according to *Dasein*, entailing that the exemplifying insecurity, for instance, of living as Christians in the formative period of the church, transforms into the ontic insecurity of facing the world. The otherworldly security, pertaining to faith, seems to undergo a ‘fall from grace’, as it were, losing its intrinsic criteria for being anything but a candidate for inner-worldly attitudes, a possible way of dulling the conditionality of angst. Following Heidegger through the 20s, it seems that for him the historical significance of Christianity, the relational meaning with which religion and philosophy approach one another, gives way to a *prima philosophia* aiming to conceive of

<sup>268</sup> In a way, this is the uncanny ‘homelessness’ that Siddhatta Gotama welcomed in his ‘going forth’, cf. Armstrong, 2000, 3–13 (as above 6.2).



facticity as such, that is, the initial conditions for relating to anything at all (a commitment to transcendentalism, as Cassirer saw it). As far as I can tell, however, this move was already under way in his reading of Pauline letters. Yet, while playing out the insecurity of his own stance by embarking on a phenomenology of religion at the beginning of the 20s, he arrived in *Sein und Zeit* at the standpoint of trying to secure a place for philosophy (later on abandoned once again by placing ‘thinking’ over and above philosophy). By making this move, the indication of a situated subjectivity (of life experience) became generalized as *Dasein*. Singularity was kept, not as the factic condition of a philosophical stance, but as an ontologically conceived condition of being. An ontological differentiation (between the ontic and the ontological) had taken place.

The solipsism of the ontological determination mirrors, to some extent, the inefable world-relation pointed out by early Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, where he states that “[t]he world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy” (TLP 6.43). The world of facts is exactly the same for both; they are submitted to the same objective conditions (of security/insecurity), yet their opposing attitudes make their worlds incomparable. Likewise, attempting to conceive of a phenomenology of religion, Heidegger took pains to indicate the way in which the ‘what’ of factic life experience was rooted in its ‘how’, his point being, therefore, that only the actualization of an original experience could prevent philosophy (in the form of phenomenology) from falling into inauthentic objectivity. In other words, the world of Paul is unique, not only because it differs from the world of a spectator who doesn’t share his predicament, but also, and more significantly, because people who lived under the same objective conditions, but didn’t *convert* to Christianity, lived (in) a completely different world than those who did convert. In other words: the ‘as if not’ made a world of difference (Having a wife ‘as-if-not’ having one differed entirely from merely *having* a wife) under the same socio-historical conditions. The world of the believer was being turned-around and was, therefore, ‘quite another’ than that of the nonbeliever. The phenomenological explication, which aims to narrow in on the specific – *immer individueller* – historical facticity nevertheless allows for categories such as a ‘Christian experience’. However unique the world was, which was Paul’s and Paul’s only, the formal indication of his ‘*Bekümmern*’ seems to draw his addressees into the same time-world of facticity.

If we allow ourselves, anachronistically, the ontologically conceived concepts of ‘*Angst*’ and ‘*Sorge*’ to shine through this ‘*Bekümmern*’, the perspective – Heidegger’s perspective that is – changes into that of singularized *Dasein*. The ‘turning-around’ of conversion turns into a being-towards-death which is, at the same time, a ‘turning-towards’ the singularity of being-in-the-world. We would then have to assess whether the life lived in – and as – the expectation of parousia had turned into a fallen form of *Dasein*, a state of inauthenticity (even if ‘Das Man’ would be nothing but an excited minority), or whether it disclosed an awakened authenticity of anxiously facing the profound insecurity of being-in-the-world as such.



In Wittgenstein's terms, the 'happy' man whose will is in accordance with the will of the world, as it were, is able to appreciate the facts of the world *sub specie aeterni* (from the point of view from eternity), that is, not merely as facts, but as events imbued with meaning. Angst turns into wonder. By wondering, not *how* the world is, but *that* it is, we are faced with the 'world as a limited whole' (TLP 6.45), much like the sense in which the world as such is the 'Before what' (*Wovor*) characteristic of angst (1993, 187). But is this 'contemplation' – *Anschaung*, as Wittgenstein calls it – of the world as a limited whole located abstractly, that is, transcendently, beyond the conditionality of *being-in-the-world*? Wittgenstein actually states, still in *Tractatus*, that "[t]he subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world" (TLP 5.632). Yet so does Heidegger, when he views *Dasein* through the conditionality of angst, that is, as a being-in-the-world which is not simply a being *in* the world, but a reflection of it, facing the world as such, since *Dasein* is the form of being that faces itself as being *there*.<sup>269</sup> By authentically *facing* this located presence, *Dasein* is struck by '*Un-heimlichkeit*', that is, of not-being-at-home. It does not *belong to* the world. Yet, "[t]he world and life are one", as Wittgenstein says (TLP 5.621), and the mark of solipsism, corresponding with the '*Sein-können*' and the being-toward-death of *Dasein*, is: "I am my world" (5.621), implying that death cannot be part of it (6.4311), since death is not lived-through (*erlebt*). Therefore, "[i]f by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present", Wittgenstein writes and continues: "Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit" (TLP 6.4311). Rather than the vertical cessation of 'being-able-to' (cf. *Sein-können*), which marks the temporal limit of singularized *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit*, Wittgenstein adopts a horizontal view of timeless being which extends along the infinite possibilities of that which might be the case.<sup>270</sup> Whether angst or hope, happiness or unhappiness, may spring from it is another matter.

It goes without saying that Wittgenstein and Heidegger don't speak the same philosophical language. Whereas the formality of Heidegger's fundamental ontology shows in the *existentials*, that is, the modes of being according to the temporality of *Dasein*, the formality of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* shows in the logical structure of

<sup>269</sup> In the much later *Letter on Humanism* (*Brief über den 'Humanismus'*), which is typically interpreted in light of Heidegger's so-called 'Kehre' (*Turning*), he emphasizes the transcendent character of 'the world' from the point of view of human *ex-istence*, that is, its 'standing-out' in Being, 2004, 350.

<sup>270</sup> The inspiration behind Wittgenstein's utterance is likely to come from Goethe's poem *Gott, Gemüt und Welt*, in which he urges that "[i]f you want to step into infinity, just go in all directions into the finite" (*Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten Geh nu rim Endlichen nach allen Seiten*, 1939, 100). The same thought is already found in Baumgarten and actually highlighted by Cassirer as representative of an aesthetic conception of the infinite within finitude, 1932, 474. Cassirer's study of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, in which this theme is taken up, was conceived and published in the immediate aftermath of the Davos seminar, and Gordon interprets it in light of his dispute with Heidegger, 2010, 296 f.

language, isomorphic with the structure of the world. Therefore, “the language which I understand [means] the limits of *my* world” (5.62), Wittgenstein states. The world, in Wittgenstein’s sense, is, on the one hand, nothing but that which in language can be stated as facts (TLP 1), and on the other hand, nothing but that which *transcends* language as a meaningful ‘whole’ for the subject.

When Heidegger, after his so-called ‘Kehre’ (*Turning*), takes up the question of language in relation to Being, he calls it ‘The house of Being’ and adds in response to Jean Beaufret’s question about the fate of humanism (which must, of course, be seen in light of the aftermath of the Second World War) that this dwelling (*Behausung*) is where ‘the human being’ (*Mensch*) lives (*wohnt*, 2004, 313). Significantly, the singularization of *Dasein* has become exchanged with the attempt to think *with Being* as such. Heidegger even tries, in the mother tongue of his addressee, to express the radicalness of this attempt by using a double genitive construction (*subiectivus* and *obiectivus*), namely: “penser, c’est l’engagement de l’Être” (*thinking, is the engagement of Being*) (op.cit. 314). Not only must we think *Being* before we think *Human* being, we must also let Being engage our thinking in the first place. Thus, to understand the essence of language (cf. *Wesensdimension der Sprache*) is to understand that it houses *the truth* of Being (op.cit. 318). But that it *houses* it and, accordingly, secures a dwelling for human beings does not mean that it identifies Being. On the contrary, it is thinking which brings the unspoken word of Being (*das ungesprochene Wort des Seins*) to language (op.cit. 361). I venture to claim that this relation between thinking and Being, beyond the actual situatedness of factic life experience, *Dasein*, and language, was, though not fully conceived, the innermost issue in early Heidegger as well. What was formally indicated (according to his concept of *Formale Anzeige*) was, in the last instance, not the factic life experience of Paul or his addressees, nor the hypothetical result of a renewed actualization, but the – original and originating – intertwinement of being and thinking. Therefore, any factic or theoretical objectification whatsoever could only divert attention from this issue. In fact, something similar seems to be at work in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, though here the concern is instead the objectification of a world of facts and the expression of thought by way of language. However, what allows language to depict the world by means of logical correspondence is as such ineffable. Language is unable to express its own order, and accordingly, its own being. It has just *come to be*, as it were. What is, therefore, left out in *Tractatus* is, in a way, the question of *being*. And what is important in *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein confessed, was exactly that which was not stated in it.

The later Wittgenstein came to acknowledge that the quest for a logical order of world-depiction, described by sentences which by definition had to be nonsensical, had resulted in claiming the determinacy of meaning (cf. TLP 3.221–3.23) rather than in revealing what language is. Turning his attention to actual language in use, he no longer looked for secure relations between words and meanings. Instead, he embraced language as a social phenomenon, or rather: *he realized the social*

*being of language*. Suspended in the process was, traditionally speaking, philosophy as a privileged point of view. Heidegger came to a comparable assessment by regarding philosophy as temporarily substituted by thinking (op.cit. 364), attentive to nothing but Being. Thus, already in his *Letter on Humanism* (*Brief über den 'Humanismus'*), he refers to a way of thinking which is more strict than the 'conceptual' (*begriffliche*, op.cit. 357). It is noticeable, however, that he now seems to have gained enough confidence, compared with the 'insecurity' of his phenomenology of religion, to speak freely of that which *matters* in thinking (cf. "Der Sache des Denkens"), namely its commitment to those 'sayings' (cf. *Sage*) which surpass the validity of scientific objectification by letting *Being be*.<sup>271</sup> One may immediately recall Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as obliged to leave everything as it is (PI § 124). But it is not Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* who utters this. It is the pragmatically converted, turned-around, Wittgenstein who faces the rule-like character of language, and warns philosophy against interfering "in any way with the actual use of language", which means that "it can in the end only describe it" (ibid.). Contrary to the Tractarian 'picture', language represents no order, no underlying being. So even if the philosophical attitudes between the two thinkers appear closer than ever inasmuch as they strive to *listen* and *see*, instead of productively *conceiving*, a growing disparity between them has, nevertheless, taken effect. Whereas Heidegger, following 'the voice of Being', as it were, searches for a still deeper *ground* of thinking, Wittgenstein apparently proceeds in the opposite direction, accepting a certain *groundlessness* as characteristic of the way in which language use is 'simply' a form of life.<sup>272</sup>

This difference calls for a decision. Should a philosophy of religion follow the direction of later Heidegger or of later Wittgenstein? The first route seems to open-up an almost mystical dimension of thinking, giving heed to an openness of Being which doesn't shy from expecting the possibility of a return of the gods (2004, 330). The second route seems to run the risk of reducing these 'gods', that is, religious belief, to a form of life, a use of language. Although both Heidegger and Wittgenstein abstained from raising questions about the truth-content of religious belief, their ways of thinking were anything but indifferent to religion as a way of inhabiting the world. We will have to ask ourselves, in this respect, whether or not a philosophy of religion can afford to let itself be found in a 'clearing' of Being which, although it precedes any symbolic or confessional representation, brings it so close to 'religion itself' that it may be unable to discern it?<sup>273</sup> Likewise, we must decide whether a philoso-

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. "Denn sie lässt das Sein – sein", op.cit. 358.

<sup>272</sup> Rorty has also noted these inverse lines of development in Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's thinking, cf. Rorty, 1991b.

<sup>273</sup> It goes without saying that Heidegger faces a similar difficulty on account of Being, inasmuch as "Das Sein ist das nächste. Doch die Nähe bleibt dem Menschen am fernsten", 2004, 331.

phy of religion is justified in speaking of religion merely as a 'grammar' of language, imbedded in a form of life? A third question which, in a sense, precedes the others, is whether a philosophy of religion can afford – or justify – to be anything but *philosophy pure and simple* before it attempts to speak about anything at all, including the topic of religion? If an answer to this question is unremittingly negative, nothing can be decided on account of what a philosophy, committed to some field of investigation, can or cannot afford or justify concerning this specific area. But *is it* obvious that the question of philosophy as such is independent of religion? The early Heidegger never fully explains why he regards Christianity to be *the* pertinent subject matter for a phenomenology of religion (although his theological background speaks for itself), but it seems evident that neither his 'philosophical atheism' of the 20s nor the 'Gelassenheit' of his latest phase, is in any way directed *against* religion or theology. Rather, Heidegger's thinking aims at Being on a level with which religion – or at least certain non-authoritative aspects of religion – seem much more in harmony than science and traditional metaphysics. To some degree, the same can actually be said of Wittgenstein, early as well as late (though on somewhat different grounds), inasmuch magic, myth and religion remain communicatively dependent on the *very relation* they create with 'another world' (whether by means of 'contemplation', 'images', or rituals). Nothing is explained about religion, but *seen-in-light-of* (a form of life). And this is, basically, what language does: it makes matters be seen, not as *they are in themselves*, but in-light-of (the use of language as a form of life). The reason why this is not merely a linguistic transformation of Kantian transcendentalism (as Habermas and Apel would have it) is that this 'aspectuality' is not determined by reason as such, but by practice (including reasoning) as a form of life. Referring to the vocabulary of *Sein und Zeit*, one might add: the aspect of religion is viewed as determined by our being-in-the-world. Wittgenstein and Heidegger concur in regarding our world as that which appears through language. To make this language transparent, however, to something 'beyond it', or 'coming to it', is what differentiates Heidegger from the later Wittgenstein. And by this move (which in retrospect seems embryonically present from the beginning) Heidegger takes leave of philosophy, not only in the sense of classical metaphysics, but also in the form of conceptual thinking, a consequence he readily admits (though only for the sake of committing thinking ever more strictly to the question of Being).

In the present work I shall hold fast to philosophy as a conceptual engagement which keeps within the bounds of itself. Overstepping these bounds, I would feel out of my depths, not at home, as it were. Heidegger may seem to point to this condition himself by speaking of language as that house of Being that allows us our being-in-the-world to be a habitation or dwelling (*Wohnen*, 2004, 358). Referring to Hölderlin's verse "Voll verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnet/ der Mensch auf dieser Erde" (*Full of merit, though poetically, dwells the human being on this earth*), he explicates the non-metaphorical sense in which 'the house of Being' should be understood. What he implicitly refers to is the original meaning of 'house', as in what it means, for

instance, to be *housed by language*. Only a year later, he speaks about language<sup>274</sup> as that which does not *express* something, but simply *speaks*.<sup>275</sup> When human beings speak, language happens (GA 12, 9). We cannot think what language hasn't *thought* already, language is not merely a medium of realization, but using it *is realization*. I do not want my own philosophical foothold to be anywhere beyond this point, well aware that Heidegger wants to pry deeper. In the other text, *The Letter on Humanism*, he speaks of language as the *residence* of the essential human existence (*Behausung des Wesens des Menschen*), which, beyond all installations of rules (*alle Aufstellung von Regeln*), lets this existence *reside* in the truth of Being.<sup>276</sup> Language thus makes a shelter (*Hut*), which guards (*hütet*) the 'standing-out' (*ex-istenz*) of human beings in Being (or, more precisely, the standing-out which is the *in-being* of human beings). Interestingly, this foothold, or taking *rest* (*Halt*), which is something given (rather than taken), is exactly what is called blasphemous in the early courses on a phenomenology of religion (GA 60, 122).<sup>277</sup> In other words, the insecurity of being, which permeated Heidegger's interest in Pauline religion and became ontologically singularized in *Dasein*, now unfolds as a security of *being-in-the-truth-of-being*. However, contrary to Heidegger finding this 'security' in Being as the last resort of thinking, even beyond the residence of language, the later Wittgenstein sees the form of a philosophical problem in *not knowing one's way about* (PI § 123).

Concerned with the question about religious faith, he imagines what it must be like to believe and to see life from above, while still finding oneself standing on the ground, admitting the limitation of one's own truthfulness. Realizing the utopia of this fancy, he claims that "[y]ou write about yourself from your own height. You don't stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet" (CV, 33e). Pragmatic philosophy does not have a ladder at its disposal. Abandoning metaphysics as anything but an inclination accompanying our way of using language,<sup>278</sup> Wittgenstein aims to find his foothold – as a philosopher – in the muddled aggregate of habits.<sup>279</sup> Finding myself in the same position with regard to religious faith – that is, not sharing it but being

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274 More precisely, he reflects on (*bedenkt*) the 'essencing' of language, asking: "Wie west de Sprache als Sprache?", GA 12, 10.

275 Cf. 'Die Sprache spricht'.

276 Heidegger's play on words leads from 'Aufenthalt', guaranteed by that which holds (*Haltbar*), to the halt, or rest ('Halt'), and is further linked with 'Hut' (*Shelter*), and 'hüten' (*guarding*), all pertaining to the truth of Being. These linguistic affinities, however, are difficult, not to say impossible, to preserve in translation.

277 In Heidegger's words: "Dieser Begriff des 'Halts' hat einen Sinn in euner ganz bestimmten Struktur der faktischen Lebenserfahrung. Man kann ihn nicht auf die christliche Lebenserfahrung anwenden. Der Christ findet nicht in Gott seinen 'Halt' (vgl. Jaspers). Das ist eine Blasphemie".

278 Wittgenstein's perspective here departs from Heidegger who speaks of a *Verwindung* ('transformation'), rather than *Überwindung* (overcoming) of metaphysics.

279 This interpretation of the pragmatism of the late Wittgenstein is in strict opposition to Sloterdijk's recent view, cf. 2013, 131 ff.

surrounded by it, as it were – I must approach it from my own level. It goes without saying that I am not in a position to say what philosophy as such must do, but I lean towards Wittgenstein in remaining on the floor, as it were, approaching religion with the means I share with it, that is, language, implying a shared behavior, at least in the communicative *use* of this language. At this point I must, therefore, distance myself from Heidegger.

By speaking about language as the language of Being in the same sense as the clouds are the clouds of *heaven* (2004, 564), he acknowledges the ‘Halt’ it provides for our ‘being-at-home’, but at the same time he literally denounces it as the level at which thinking rests. By speaking *about* this level we already transcend it. If Heidegger’s positioning here oversteps the boundaries of philosophy, which I tend to think it does (and *must do* as being unconditionally committed to following its own line of thought), it also oversteps the boundaries of a philosophy of religion. If this prevents religion from engaging us as an event (*Ereignis*) of Being, then so be it. What still merits a philosophical reflection, however, is the way in which language, as well as religion, presents a residence of being, a way of making the world a home for humans.

In this respect, Heidegger points to eye-opening aspects, not only in his ontological analysis of angst concerning *Un-heimlichkeit*, but also in his post-war reflections on the secondary nature of humanism. In this respect he focuses on the primary *Behausung* (residence) of language as a conception of ‘being-at-home’. Hölderlin’s concept of *Heimat* (homeland) points in the same direction, according to Heidegger, bearing the connotations of historically dwelling in the presence of Being.<sup>280</sup> Taking up the question of ethics from this point of view, Heidegger bypasses the ‘humanist’ implications characteristic of a modern view on ethics,<sup>281</sup> and cites instead a famous fragment by Heraclitus: “ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων” (fr. 119 DK = fr. 247 KRS). The traditional translation sounds: “Seine Eigenart ist dem Menschen sein Dämon” (2004, 354), corresponding with “Man’s character is his daimon” (KRS, p. 211),<sup>282</sup> but Heidegger emphasizes instead the importance of paying heed to the meaning of ‘residing, the abode of dwelling’ (*Aufenthalt, Ort des Wohnens*) resounding from the Greek ἦθος (ethos) (ibid.). Thus, he interprets the gnomon as saying: “The human being resides, inasmuch as it is human, in the presence of God.”<sup>283</sup> Heidegger further couples this reading with a saying about Heraclitus according to which he was addressed by some

<sup>280</sup> Cf. “Die Heimat dieses geschichtlichen Wohnens ist die Nähe zum Sein” in contrast to the ‘homelessness of modern people’, “die Heimatslosigkeit des neuzeitlichen Menschen”, op.cit. 338.

<sup>281</sup> Although Heidegger denies to speak about ‘Heimat’ in any nationalistic sense (op.cit. 338), but conceives it ‘seinsgeschichtlich’, that is, through a history of Being, it gives rise to unfortunate associations when he thinks of it as forestalling the humane.

<sup>282</sup> There is a general agreement as to the translation of δαίμων as ‘character’ in this fragment, cf. Kahn (1979, 260) and Robinson (1987, 159 f), who also agree in relating it specifically to a concept of fate for which man is thus himself responsible.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. “Der Spruch sagt: der Mensch wohnt, insofern er Mensch ist, in der Nähe Gottes”, 2004, 354 f.



visitors while he was warming himself at the fireplace. When the guests hesitated to enter his house, he bid them inside with the following words of encouragement: “For also here gods are present...” (εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεοὺς, op.cit., cf. Aristoteles, *De part. anim.* A 5, 645 a 17). In Heidegger’s construal of the scene, the visitors became embarrassed by catching the famous philosopher occupied by simple needs at an ordinary ‘resting place’ (*Aufenthalt*, op.cit. 355). However, he assures them, implicitly, that whatever they seek, gods are present even at this inconspicuous abode (*unscheinbarer Ort*). The point Heidegger wants to draw from this anecdote is that the opening of Being, indicated by the presence of gods, is found *nowhere but in the most ordinary situation*, that is, *rooted in daily life*, and this is what ἡθός means.<sup>284</sup> Thus, Heidegger takes the fragment ἡθός ἀνθρώπων δαίμων to mean that it is exactly the ‘homely’ habitation of human beings that opens for the presencing of the gods, the ‘un-homely’ as such: “*Der (geheure) Aufenthalt ist dem Menschen das Offene für die Anwesenung des Gottes (des Un-geheuren)*” (op.cit. 356).<sup>285</sup> Heidegger has, in other words, arrived at a double aspect of the relation between ‘world’ and ‘home’. From *Dasein*’s being ‘held out’ in ‘the Nothing’<sup>286</sup>, where it realizes, in angst, that there is no rest or halt (*Halt*, op.cit. 112), that is, nothing to hold on to, he has turned to the way in which language provides human beings with a ‘resting place’ (*Aufenthalt*) in the truth of Being. Of special interest, in this respect, is his interpretation of a poem by Georg Trakl, presented in his paper *On Language (Die Sprache)* from 1950. The poem, called *Winter Evening*, contains the three following verses:

Window with falling snow is arrayed,  
Long tolls the vesper bell,  
The house is provided well,  
The table is for many laid.

<sup>284</sup> As for a random comparison, the Buddhist historian Sukumar Dutt tells of the Vedic rites of *upavasatha* that they took place at a time “when the gods ‘dwelt near’ the householder and his family beside the fire”, cf. Armstrong, 2000, 16.

<sup>285</sup> The ingenuity of Heidegger’s interpretation aside, it must be said that δαίμων (*daemon*) is not synonymous with θεός (*theos*), let alone with θεοί (*plural*). Rather, daemons are divine beings that hover between heaven and earth, between immortals and mortals, as angels do in the Semitic tradition (cf. Philo, *De Gigantibus*, § 2; *De Somniis*, i. 22), where the common denominator is that they often act as messengers on behalf of the gods. Thus, an intriguing parallel comes to mind in Genesis 19.1–3, where *angels* appear within the city gate of Sodom. They reluctantly accept Lot’s invitation to stay overnight in his house and as they stay there he serves them unleavened bread. The obvious (though mostly structural) similarity between the two tales may make us wonder whether Heraclitus’s visitors are, in fact, reluctant daemons who are welcomed with the assurance that his home is as also place for divine beings. At any rate, the comparison demonstrates that the preparation and serving of bread play a crucial role in both encounters, thus strengthening Heidegger’s point. Karl Ove Knausgaard has poetically emphasized the *uncanny* aspect of the angelic visit in Lot’s human home, 2009, chapter 1.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. “*Dasein heisst: Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*” (2004, 115), written in the immediate aftermath of *Sein und Zeit*.



Wandering ones, more than a few,  
 Come to the door on darksome courses,  
 Golden blooms the tree of graces  
 Drawing up the earth's cool dew.

Wanderer quietly steps within;  
 Pain has turned the threshold to stone.  
 There lie, in limpid brightness shown,  
 Upon the table bread and wine.<sup>287</sup>

The poetic imagery centers on a threshold (*Schwelle*) between the cold and dark evening *outside* and the warm and bright atmosphere *inside*, and there is no firmly established point of view other than from the threshold itself, as it were. The threshold obviously refers to the doorstep of a house, a home, where a table has been set with bread and wine. And although this boundary between dark and light is hardened by pain (*Schmerz*), the 'wanderer' is implicitly invited to cross it, thanks to a gracing abundance which, within the walls of a house, draws its sustenance from the earth. As Heidegger writes:

The third stanza bids the wanderer enter from the dark outdoors into the brightness within. The houses of the many and the tables of daily meals have become house of God and altar (Heidegger 1971, 18 = GA 12, 16, translation taken from Heidegger, 2013, 194).<sup>288</sup>

He seems indeed justified to imply the connotation of a religious communion inasmuch as the church-bell, sounding from the outside, may seem to summon the

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**287** Translation by Alfred Hofstadter, Heidegger 2013, 192 f.

#### **Ein Winterabend**

Wenn der Schnee ans Fenster fällt,  
 Lang die Abendglocke läutet,  
 Vielen ist der Tisch bereitet  
 Und das Haus ist wohlbestellt.

Mancher auf der Wanderschaft  
 Kommt ans Tor au funklen Pfaden.  
 Golden blüht der Baum der Gnaden  
 Aus der Erde kühlem Saft.

Wanderer tritt still herein;  
 Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle.  
 Da erglänzt in reiner Helle  
 Auf dem Tische Brot und Wein.

**288** Cf. "Die dritte Strophe bittet den Wanderer herein aus dem dunklen Draussen in die Helle drinnen. Aus den Häusern der Vielen und aus den Tischen ihrer alltäglichen Mahlzeiten ist das Gotteshaus und der Altartisch geworden".

wanderer, who is then called to receive the grace. And he is welcomed by those who already have a rest in its paradisiacal light. At the same time, Heidegger focuses on the daily situation of an evening meal. The tree of charity, conveying ‘the heavenly blessings’ (*dem Segen des Himmels*, op.cit. 21), is also rooted in the earth from which a bodily sustenance in the form of bread and wine is dispensed. Glancing back at the saying about Heraclitus, we should notice that the furnace (ἰπνος), the comforting warmth of which protects the philosopher against the cold, caught Heidegger’s attention as simultaneously alluding to an oven in which the daily bread was baked (op.cit. 355).<sup>289</sup> Connecting to the two texts, chosen by Heidegger as exemplary illuminations of Being in a daily world, we thus understand the weight that lies in the picture of providing the daily needs (bread, warmth) belonging to a house in the concrete sense of a physically sheltering *home*. The weight, however, comes from the way in which this picture transparently discloses Being as an opening through which the divine enters the world of humans, not in a symbolic house of God,<sup>290</sup> but at the exact spot of being human, entailing the awareness of basic needs.

What I shall focus on in this context is the way in which the double perspective (that is, of ‘*Geheure*’ and ‘*Un-geheure*’, ‘*Heimlich*’ and ‘*Un-heimlich*’, connoting the duality between ‘*Mensch*’ and ‘*Gott*’ as well) connects with the conditionality of angst, pertaining to *Dasein*, on the one hand, and the residing (*Behausung*) in language and daily work, pertaining to human beings, on the other. Crossing the so-called ‘*Kehre*’, we might say that Heidegger has come to speak of ‘the world’ as an abode as well as an abyss. On the one hand, the ‘world as such’ constitutes the insecurity of temporal being, grounding it in Nothing. On the other hand, it grants the security of a life-giving earth. The ‘not-being-at-home’, the very condition of mortality, meets the ‘being-at-home’ of mortal existence (standing-out) in the immortal clearing of Being. Not having a rest (*Halt*) and having a rest in Being are two sides of the same coin. The point I am driving at, in this respect, is that this ‘double’ can be seen in light of the aspects by which the worlds of the happy and the unhappy man differ from one another, according to the young Wittgenstein.

It goes without saying that the thought about ‘an unhappy man’ should not be confused with the conditionality of angst. Unhappiness is likely to cover a wide range of concerns, from trivial matters to existential profundity (encompassing fear as well

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**289** Picking up on the comparison between tales about Heraclitus and Lot (cf. above, note 285), we may take notice of Gen. 19.28, in which the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah is depicted in terms of being surrendered to a furnace. The holocaust of the citizens, who had turned against god and, accordingly, ignored the angelic presence, may thus be seen as an uncanny inversion of life-giving preparation and sustenance of the bread depending on a daily gratitude towards the divine.

**290** In support of this interpretation one might refer to Heraclitus’ alleged scolding of people who pray to the statues of gods “as if one were to carry on a conversation with houses, not recognizing the true nature of gods or demi-gods”, Heraclitus, fr. 241 (KRS, p. 209 = Fr. 5 DK, Aristocritus *Theosophia* 68, compare 74 = 128 DK).

as angst). However, Wittgenstein's point seems to be that regardless of the actual state of affairs, it is not these conditions as such, but the way in which one relates to them that makes the world either a 'happy' or an 'unhappy' one. Analogously, Heidegger speaks about 'relating' by way of *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity) and *ereignen* (authenticating, appropriating), though, surely, in connection with the subject-transcending *Ereignis* (event) of Being. Yet, the intrinsic element of 'relating' even in this *event* allows us to view the duality of unhappiness and happiness in light of the double, that is, 1) the conditionality of angst, reflecting the void of Nothing, where there is no hold, as against 2) the comfort of having a hold, owing to the divine grace of being given a home, that is, the (housing) realm of language, earth, house, food, and daily work. In other words, there is nothing but an *aspectral* difference separating the dark side of Being, as it were, from its clearing (*Lichtung*). Nevertheless, one could say with Trakl that the difference is a threshold hardened by pain (cf. "Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle"). Those who wander on dark paths will have to be invited by 'those' who, unidentified in the poem, rest in the warm glow of a home (linking up, neatly, with the strangers (ξένοι) who hesitate to enter the house of Heraclitus).<sup>291</sup> If we understand the anonymous voice of welcome, speaking through Trakl's poem, along the lines of Heidegger's terms, we might take it to reflect the housing presence of Being, the immortal aspect of which does not change *the conditions* of mortal existence, but nevertheless graces it with its own light. To work the land and consume its fruit (bread and wine) in light of that which offers it, that is, Being,<sup>292</sup> is, according to Heidegger, to rest in the presence of the gods.

Hesiod's poem *Works and Days* (dating from around 700 BCE) comes to mind in this respect. It presents itself as a direct address to Hesiod's brother concerning the division of an inherited soil. The narrator, Hesiod, thus indirectly reproaches Perses for craving more than his due, and he exhorts him to abstain from conflict (ἔρις) inasmuch as he should not wish for more than what he can produce by his own hands (Op. 20 f). Since the gods have taken away the self-generating fruits, they once shared with man in the Golden Age (Op. 42), human beings have been surrendered to the daily toil of working the land for themselves (Op. 28). As a background for this lot of man, which no one, neither king nor farmer, should strive to transgress (or they will be punished for their *hubris*), Hesiod refers to a myth of the 5 human races.

Succeeding the original conditions, shared by gods and human beings, the Olympian gods produced (ποίησαν<sup>293</sup>) a golden race who knew of no want (Op. 113), as the fields automatically supplied them with a bountiful harvest (Op. 117–18). No sorrows

<sup>291</sup> The same goes for the angels of Gen.1.28, see above note 285.

<sup>292</sup> The double meaning of 'offering' and 'being' is summarized by Heidegger in 'es gibt'.

<sup>293</sup> The meaning of 'produced', 'fabricated', with which the verb is used here, is related to ποίησις (*poiesis*) in the sense of story-telling (poetry), and may thus signal a mythical holism which, to some degree, counteracts the allegorical aspect of his poem.

were in stall for members of this generation, and death came to them as pleasant as a sleep. The succeeding silver race, however, was far inferior to the former (Op. 127). Conflict ruled among members of this generation, and they neglected to sacrifice to the Olympians (Op. 136). The next generation of bronze was no better off, though it did not in any way resemble the former (Op. 144). People of this race were constantly at war with each other and had to suffer the fate of death in the dark and icy realm of Hades (Op. 154). Then a race of heroes emerged. They proved to be far more righteous, and some of them were even selected to live everlasting on the 'isles of the blest' (Op. 170), where thrice a year the grain-giving earth provided them with sweet and plentiful fruit (Op. 172). By contrast, human beings of the fifth race, belonging to the contemporary age of iron, are destined to live in the hardship of daily toil. However, their conditions are neither exclusively good nor bad (Op. 179). However, because of this ambiguity, the opposition between conflict and hubris, on the one hand, and peace and righteousness, on the other, must constantly be contemplated. Since the age of iron regrettably forms the current world of Hesiod and his brother, the latter must bear in mind the ill fate befalling those who, in the past, suffered from a bad condition, and instead he must strive to follow the example of the virtuous (that is, the golden race and the age of heroes). Because of the ambivalent constitution, characterizing human beings of the present, they will have to *choose their own way of living*. The fruits of the land do not flourish on their own accord. It takes a righteous decision and strenuous effort for each man to *work his own soil*, if nature is to furnish him and his family with the bare necessities life. Hesiod finally enforces his point by demanding of his brother that he shuns idleness and provides for his own livelihood, *since work is best for him 'in accordance with his lot'* (Op. 314). The relative sentence 'in accordance with his lot' – δαίμονι δ' οἷος ἔησθα – can, alternatively, be translated as 'such that you are according to your daemon'.<sup>294</sup> Be that as it may, it seems likely at any rate that Hesiod hints at his earlier reference to the golden race of humans who *post mortem* became daemons ordained with the task of watching over the deeds of the living. This probable connotation aside, the concept of *daemon*, in singular, typically carries the meaning of lot or destiny which clearly makes sense in the present context. A thematic association with Heraclitus's ἥθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων (fr. 119) also springs to mind. If this sentence is taken to imply a divine presence at the exact spot of human residence (as well as its livelihood), one might add, in the spirit of Hesiod, that this abode is nothing but the lot of land that allows man (under current 'non-mythical' circumstances) to make a living for himself. At this residence, around which the earth is cultivated, a human *home* is fostered where mortals are not alone, but even share company with the immortals,<sup>295</sup> the divine grace of Being, as it were. Perses is,

<sup>294</sup> The translation is supported by West (1966) and Verdenius (1985).

<sup>295</sup> As I have pointed out in another connection, The Eleusinian Mysteries may very likely have centered on co-dependent conditions of being for mortals and immortals, reflecting 'a secret' collabora-

at any rate, admonished to *decide* who and what he wants to be, and if he makes the right choice, he will be in accordance with his *daemon*. The issue of choice, unmistakably addressed by Hesiod, has its counterpart in Heidegger's concept of *Entschlossenheit* (decisiveness or determination) circumventing *Dasein*'s fall from *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity). Yet, facing the world, as an opening of Nothing as well as a habitat in Being, human beings are 'thrown' in ambivalence. And so their relation with the world is determined by dread as well as confidence, horror as well as fascination. In this light, we might appreciate and perhaps reevaluate Rudolph Otto's definition of 'the numinous', the blinding light of the divine, as both *tremendum* (1936, 13 ff) and *fascinosum* (op.cit. 42 ff).

In order to illustrate his point, Otto refers to Luther as expressing this 'harmony of contrasts' (*Kontrast-harmonie*) by speaking of how "we stand in fearful awe of a sanctuary and yet want to enter it rather than to flee from it" (*wir ein Heiligtum mit Furcht ehren und doch nicht davor fliehen sondern mehr hineinzudringen*, op.cit. 42, cf. Luther, *Sermon von den guten Werken*, 1.3). In ancient Israelite religion, we hear of the place where the living God dwells, the Tabernacle (tent of revelation), deadly to those who are uninitiated. The flame of divine presence will devour anyone who has not a priestly commission to enter, and even for an appointed priest the appropriate rites of purification must be carried out before he can go safely into the shrine (3 Mos 16, 2–4). Aaron, the brother of Moses, is thus entrusted with the priestly obligation to effect purgation for his own house by sacrificing a bull. Furthermore, he acts on behalf of his people:

So he shall purge the Holy place from the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and from their trespasses of all their sins; so shall he do also for the Tabernacle of the Congregation placed with them, in the midst of their Uncleanness. (3 Mos 16, 16)

This clear example of 'sacred ambivalence', combining taboo and congregation, emanating from the abode of a divine presence in the world (the Tabernacle), does not, however, speak of emotional reactions. It is not that reactions of terror or thankfulness towards God are unspoken of in the Old Testament, far from it, but they are not relevant to the instructions by which Yahweh admonishes his chosen people to worship him. In other words, emotions of awe and fascination are not significant for religion being religion. What is significant is that the divine presence among mortals is imbued with a double aspect depending on the ritual relationship between God and man. In other words: that which may be a threat to mortal existence is, at the same time, that which secures its communal presence in the world. As we shall see, this

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tation between the cycle of life and the self-perpetuating cycle of divine beings (divided between what I am tempted to call *metaphorical* aspects of mother and daughter, father and son), Albinus, 2000, 192 ff.

may also reflect the ambiguity of *having* a home in the world and *making* the world a home but, for now, my point is merely that the ambivalent character of the holy, such as it is symbolized by a religious community, may be viewed in light of the basic conditions of being-in-the-world rather than according to a specific class of emotions (contrary to Otto, 1936, 19). Otto's own example of Luther is, of course, significant for expressing an emotional attitude, but then again, the importance of a psychological inclination rather testifies to a religious attitude of early modernity than of the ancient world of Israelite religion.

Concerning himself with the specific character of the religious emotion (prominently of 'awe'), Otto distinguishes the primitive form of 'daemonic dread' not only from fear in general, but also from a supposedly general 'Angst of the world' ('Weltangst', op.cit. 16 f). Significantly, the angst of *Dasein*, as Heidegger sees it, designates an existential (*existentiale*) state exposed to the void of Being in which there is 'nothing' to hold on to, whereas Otto focuses on 'the feeling of one's own nothingness' (*das Gefühl eigener Nichtigkeit*, op.cit. 20), at least to begin with. Rather than being merely a response to the condition of being mortal, this feeling more specifically reflects a 'creature-feeling' (*Kreaturgefühl*) of abasement before that (*the numinous*) which, experienced as an object (*objektiv erlebt*), inspires awe (*Scheu*)" (ibid.).<sup>296</sup> Holding on to this experience is, according to Otto, the humanly responsive origin of religion (op.cit. 17): "It is the mark which really characterizes the so-called 'Religion of Primitive Man', and there it appears as 'daemonic dread'" (ibid.). Then Otto lays out the evolutionistic perspective of his study by adding:

The crudely naïve and primordial emotional disturbance, and the fantastic images to which it gives rise, are later overborne and ousted by more highly-developed forms of the numinous emotion, with all its mysteriously impelling power (ibid.; translation taken from Otto, 1925, 16)

The developmental outlook aside (we shall return to this issue below), Otto characterizes the object of emotion, as well as the emotion itself, as *numinous* (adjective form of the Latin 'numen', which means 'divine presence') as well as uncanny (*Unheimlich*, op.cit. 17 f). Thus, in order to keep the religious response distinct from 'natural' fear, he says that "I may be beyond all measure afraid and terrified without there being even a trace of the feeling of uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] in my emotion" (1936, 18; cf. 1925, 17). The uncanny comes with the supernatural element, expressed in phrases such as "my blood ran icy cold" (*Es lief ihm eiskalt durch die Glieder*) and "my flesh crept" (*Mir life eine Gänsehaut über den Rücken*, ibid.), and even in the highest form of religion, the roots of the uncanny are still noticeably present (ibid.). The Holy

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<sup>296</sup> A repetition of Otto's distinction, related to this 'Scheu', is found in Spengler, 1972, 161, who interestingly locates its response in the *act of naming* (as a way of gaining power of an angst-provoking world-totality).

Ghost actually retains ‘something of a ghost’ (*Gespentisches*, 1936, 19; 1925, 17) in the impression it make “on the feelings of the worshipper, viz. the peculiar quality of the ‘uncanny’ and ‘awful’ [containing the concept of ‘awe’], which survives with the quality of exaltedness and sublimity or is symbolized by means of it” (ibid.). This double aspect of the uncanny (or in general: *the numinous*), that is, its subjective as well as objective element, is thus, according to Otto, constitutive for religion (from primitive to developed forms).

In fact, a corresponding ‘double’ may be recognized, for instance, in archaic Greek religion, where ‘the dream’ (ὄνειρον) is explicitly described in Homer as a divine appearance (either of a god or the ‘ghost’ of a dead person). Thus, the dream appears objectively to a person who is asleep (Albinus, 2000, 91). At the same time, it goes without saying that the specific dream takes place for the sleeper only, and is, therefore, a subjective phenomenon as well. The point is, however, that the latter aspect is of no consequence regarded in isolation (i.e., as a psychological phenomenon, we might say), whereas the personal, or subjective, dimension is significantly expressed by the dream appearance itself. Hence, when the ‘image’ (εἶδωλον) of Patroclus approaches the sleeping Achilles – asking him not to delay the forthcoming cremation any further lest he will prevent him from resting among the dead in Hades – the subjective aspect of the dream is emphasized by the close personal ties between the two foster-brothers. Moreover, Achilles learns about the nature of death, namely that the ‘presence’ of Patroclus turns out to be nothing but a shadow, disappearing into the earth with a hissing sound like a smoke (Il.23.100). Hereupon Achilles exclaims: “Then, for certain, even *in the house of Hades* (εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισι), there are *psychai*<sup>297</sup> and images, but they lack *the seat of life* (φρένες) altogether” (Il.23.104). The house of Hades is *an empty home*, a realm of nothingness, which may appear *as something* only by staging an exceptional encounter between the visible and *the invisible*.<sup>298</sup> In ordinary Greek cult practices, this encounter was confined to a ritual setting, as in incubation rituals or chthonic blood-oracles, the so-called *nekyomanteia* (cf. Od.11, cf. Albinus, op.cit. 67 ff), but in the tradition of *The Iliad* these specific conditions are poetically exchanged with Achilles simply falling asleep on the beach surrounded by his men (perhaps with this circumference indicating, by way of substitution, an otherwise obligatory ritual of separation, op.cit. 36).

What I want to bring out, using this example, is that we should abstain from relating the ambivalent character of divine presence – or in broader terms: the presence

<sup>297</sup> The concept of ψυχή does not, in Homer, carry the later connotations of ‘soul’ (cf. Albinus, 2000, 43 ff.), but is more akin to something like a ‘memory image’ or ‘departed life’ (reflecting to same double aspect as ὄνειρον).

<sup>298</sup> Thus, it was common in antiquity to read ‘invisible’ (αἰδής) into the name of Hades (αἰδης), cf. Il.5.845; Hes.Sc.227. This explicit point of etymological meaning was, in fact, already made by Plato, Grg. 493a; Phd. 80d, cf. Albinus, op.cit. 32, n. 21.



of the invisible within the (world of the) visible – to certain emotions of the subject, and rather pay attention to the way in which this *relation* is expressed as such in a religious tradition. Otto relates his own view to Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependency' (cf. 'Abhängigkeitsgefühl', 1936, 10), but takes exception to the romantic reduction of this feeling to some 'Selbst-Gefühl', that is, "a feeling concerning one's self in a special, determined relation, viz. one's dependency" (*ein Gefühl einer eigentümlichen Bestimmtheit meiner selbst, nämlich meiner Abhängigkeit*, *ibid.*; 1925, 10). Although we would stand guilty of misunderstanding Schleiermacher if we thought of him as down-playing *the content* of faith, Otto has a point in holding on to the double aspect of the numinous, inasmuch as the *self-relation alone* does not make us any the wiser about *religion*. However, instead of referring to the ambivalence of *numen* (divine presence) as a kind of objectivity inferred from the empirical reference to specific subjective emotions, as Otto does, we should abstain from regarding this 'objectivity' in terms other than 'its' objectified presence in language. Transgressing this conceptual boundary, as Otto does by addressing only those who knows a religious experience from their own lives (1936, 8), is a violation of the foothold that keeps philosophy from disintegrating into mere subjectivity (or *factic life experience* for that matter). Let it be said in passing that there is a world of difference between the way in which Wittgenstein, for instance, refers to an 'imponderable evidence', characteristic of experiential issues (cf. above, 132), and the way in which Otto pretends to 'measure' the emotional particulars of experience. Whereas Wittgenstein refers to something unquantifiable which seems to condition the social nature of our being, Otto strives to extract something almost palpably specific in our human condition, i.e., certain feelings, that can only be explained – or illustrated – by means of a transcendent objectivity. That this objectivity can only be indirectly hinted at, that is, approached by way of a human response, only shows that there is an element of *obscura obscurantis* in Otto's attempt to explain religion. Though this is not the road a philosophical (attempt at conceptual) clarification should care to take, Otto still hits some very interesting notes. Speaking in objective terms about 'the numinous' by way of instances such as 'the wrath of God', which he believes defy a strict conceptuality (1936, 20 f), he wants, perhaps more than anything else, to make a point about *ambivalence*. Thus, an intriguing passage runs:

'Wrath' here is the 'ideogram' of a unique emotional moment in religious experience, a moment whose singularly daunting and awe-inspiring character must be gravely disturbing to those persons who will recognize nothing in the divine nature but goodness, gentleness, love, and a sort of confidential intimacy, in a word, only those aspects of God which turn towards the world of men (*der Welt-Zugekehrtheit im Göttlichen*) (1925, 19; 1936, 22).

Apart from Otto's pointed emphasis of the numinous ambivalence, we may wonder what he has in mind by referring – in the last phrase – to the idea of that which in God is turned towards the world. Perhaps he alludes to the idea of God as *the creator of the world*, a God characterized by a self-sacrificing love for mankind. In that case, the

world is seen as a comforting place, submitted to a life in Christ, in faith of whom, the unavoidable hardships of human existence may become less absorbing or threatening. Yet, contrary to this smoothing out of the ‘tremendum’ part, Otto claims that the idea of a punishing God is not only a thing of the past, but rather reflects the feeling of awe and dread incessantly bound to accompany the belief in ‘a living God’,<sup>299</sup> even if only on a suppressed level.

Shifting the perspective back to Heidegger, one might say that the conditionality of angst is an inevitable part of being-in-the-world. To look past the home, provided for human beings by language, family, and daily work, is to look at the world as such and at nothingness as the ground of Being. The relentlessly present threat to the ‘Sein-können’ of mortal beings may not only inspire a concrete fear of dying, but also a realization in angst that one’s own being houses no security in itself.<sup>300</sup> Filling in the gap in terms of religion, as it were, the temple and the church can be seen as a providing special kind of home, a shelter against nothingness, a house of God, where existential security is (symbolically) represented by *his* ‘being there’, as it were (if only *in passing*, as Nancy would have it on the premises of modernity, cf. below, chapter 7). Now the point would be that in its modern form, the Christian church provides, as a rule, an existential shelter *for all* who seeks the presence of God (whether in prayer, confession, or merely, as in Lutheran churches, in order to rest and receive), and has thus lost the ambivalent character of numen that was characteristic of ancient religions in the Axial age.<sup>301</sup> Even if some congregants, contemplating their sinfulness, may still be inclined to bow their heads in anxious humility before the ‘eyes of God’, this would reflect an existential ‘fear of God’ and, therefore, personal inclinations (though, of course, in a social setting) rather than an institutional banishment. This is, in a way, what is implicated by Otto’s his remark (cited above) about the inclina-

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**299** Cf. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”, Paul Heb.10, 31.

**300** One of the parables of Jesus turns on this conditionality, setting it up against the ‘security’ in faith: Thus, in Matthew 7.24–27, Jesus likens those who hear his words and act on them to “a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” I take it to be obvious that the ‘house’ in this parable is pregnant with the connotation of ‘home’, of having or making a home in/of the world.

**301** However, Otto relevantly refers to the liturgy of Jewish Jom Kippur (Day of Atonement) as still representative of worshipping a fearful and awe-inspiring God, 1936, 39. Likewise, Scholem refers to the Kabbalist thought about “a whole sphere of divine light” which includes the aspect of God’s benevolence as well as “the attribute of severity and stern judgment, which mystical speculation has connected with the source of evil in God”, 1995, 13. It is significant, however, that the duality, or ambivalence, of God is not, in this respect, inferred from some emotional response. It may be highly relevant in a mystical context, though all the same indispensably related to the internal discursive frames of theologico-philosophical speculation.

tion to believe only in a beneficiary God. Yet, the purging of God's harmful presence is undertaken by religious tradition 'itself', which is more noticeable than Otto's reference to the underlying continuity of a numinous feeling. What seems to be the case, among other things, is that the mythological ambiguity of divine presence, reflecting the insecurity of threatening world conditions, has dissolved into a personal God-relation in faith, echoing an enlightened worldview, or, in Weber's and Gauchet's terms, a 'disenchantment of the world'.<sup>302</sup> Nowadays, the need for security is fundamentally divided between heavenly and worldly concerns. Physical dangers are, more consequently than ever, met with scientific means, whereas the church takes care of the soul, if the wellbeing of the latter is not even thought of in materialistic terms (in which case psychology and psychiatry are the more likely consultants).

The dark side of God has been consumed by folklore, i.e., various shapes and forms of demonism, as well as relics of Satanic belief (sociologically transformed into peripheral phenomena of Satanism). Psychologically speaking, it has perhaps inhabited the gloomier side of conscience, if we still lend a bit of credit to Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The question remains, however, as to how this development must be appreciated in terms of Heidegger's ontology or historical event of being. For one thing, Heidegger was more than reluctant to appreciate the value of anthropological studies for understanding the basics of human existence, let alone a 'natural concept of the world' (*'natürliche Weltbegriff'*, 1993, 52). What becomes apparent in a mythical way of thinking, as well as in the reported testimonies of a primitive form of life, according to Heidegger, is not a more original, let alone more authentic, form of being-in-the-world, but rather a less concealed, less complicated, absorption in the phenomena (*Aufgehen in die 'Phänomenen'*), vis-à-vis the elements of symbols and practice. Once more, we may be reminded of Wittgenstein's juxtaposition of ancient and modern people (TLP 6.371), his point being that the laws of nature for the latter have attained a function similar to that of God and Fate among the former, only that *their* view is not to be seen as a theoretical attempt to explain everything (cf. above). Thus, Heidegger may certainly agree with Wittgenstein that life among primitive people (*das Leben der primitive Völker*, cf. Heidegger, 1993, 52) should not be understood along the lines of a theoretical attempt to explain the world, but rather as a more or less transparent expression of *Dasein's* quotidian conditions (ibid.). In Peter E. Gordon's concise phrasing:

By 'everydayness', he [Heidegger] wished only to draw philosophical attention to the fact that human interpretative activities are lived for the most part in an absorbed and nontheoretical concern. Everydayness was therefore a modality of all human understanding, and among other things this implied that primitive *Dasein* exhibits everydayness no less and no more than does any sort of 'developed' culture (2010, 238).

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<sup>302</sup> Thus, one may think especially of Gauchet's notion of Christianity as a kind of faith that nourishes the dissolution of religion at its bosom, 1997, *passim*.

Acclaiming the second volume of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* for containing clues of far-reaching importance (1993, 51, n.1), Heidegger nevertheless addresses the need for a point of departure that precedes symbolic spontaneity. To give an example, Cassirer sees the Polynesian notion of a living force, the so-called 'mana', as an instance of the human inclination in mythical thinking to construct their surroundings as a sacred totality from which the meaning of every possible occurrence is gathered. Heidegger finds this view profoundly mistaken. In his eyes, the objectified form, in which Cassirer conceives of symbolic meaning-systems as representing an imaginative world-projection, turns the blind eye to "the mode of being of mythic 'life' which enables the mana-representation to function as the guiding ... understanding of Being" (1976, 43). What is required is instead a focus on the 'ontological constitution' (*Seinsverfassung*) of *Dasein*, and if 'care' (*Sorge*) is henceforth demonstrated to be the structuring principle (i.e., a basic 'existential'), then it is 'thrownness' that provides a ground for comprehending the specific form of 'Entwurf' represented by 'mana', rather than *vice versa* (ibid.). Thus Heidegger claims that Cassirer's neo-Kantian premises "blocked him from appreciating the ontological structure of myth as a *form of life*" (Gordon, op.cit. 241). Taking his point of departure in the mythic 'consciousness of objects' (*Gegenstandsbewusstseins*), Cassirer failed to recognize the ontological conditions for something to *even become* a conscious subject matter in the first place (1976, 42). Since these conditions are unchangeably related to *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, Cassirer's attempt to conceive the notion of 'mana' from a position within an enlightened worldview is judged by Heidegger as being presumptuous (Gordon, op.cit. 240).

This demurral bears some similarity with Wittgenstein's criticism of Renan's evolutionistic and speculative account of mythical thinking (see above, 5.4). Wittgenstein stressed against Renan that the human tendency to wonder (*Staunen*) about the world (expressed in the ascription of sacred power to ordinary phenomena such as 'birth', 'sickness', 'death', 'sleep', and 'dreams') did not need, and indeed had no place in, an evolutionist explanation (KB 2011, 38). We may still, under the most familiar and daily circumstances, be struck with wonder about the nature of things. This general inclination, easily suppressed in a modern world view, but nonetheless permeating the mythical backdrop of language, is taken up again by Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer (PO, 133). One of the comments reads: "I should like to say: nothing shows our kinship to those savages better than the fact that Frazer has on hand a word as familiar to himself and to us as 'ghost' or 'shade' in order to describe the views of these people" (ibid.). Although a belief in ghosts doesn't sit well with a scientific worldview, and, therefore, only enjoys a marginal representation in modernity, we are all familiar with the concept. Moreover, Wittgenstein finds it intimately related to the concepts of 'soul' and 'spirit', and claims that we tend to ignore the peculiar fact that the latter are "part of our educated vocabulary" (ibid.), although they are just as mythical as 'ghost' and 'shade'. Hence, "[a]n entire mythology is stored within our language" (ibid.). Wittgenstein's point, in this respect, is not to direct our attention

to layers of former thinking, deposited in our language, but to a *general inclination*. Thus, in his later remarks on Frazer, he focuses on the unsettling impression ancient rites may make on us as, for instance, the Beltane Fire Festival (ibid. 139 ff). What disturbs us, Wittgenstein claims, does not stem from an historical hypothesis about these rites having their origin in human sacrifice (op.cit. 147). Rather we are struck by a similar inclination in ourselves.

When I see such a practice, or hear of it, it is like seeing a man speaking harshly to someone else over a trivial matter, and noticing from his tone of voice and facial expression that this man can on occasion be terrible. The impression that I receive here can be very deep, and extraordinary serious (ibid.)

A ritual may thus seem to reflect an unwarranted tendency in man to overreact, but it is not the psychological disposition that captures Wittgenstein's interest. It is rather "[t]he *surroundings* [*Umgebung*] of a way of acting" (ibid.), the conditions under which human life takes form, that is, becomes a *form of life*, rather than just being individual outbursts of emotion. Thus, festivals such as the Beltane Fire Festival may, on the one hand, reflect something recognizably strange (*Seltsam*) in ourselves and known from our own experiences (op.cit. 151), but they cannot, on the other hand, be "made up by one person, so to speak, at random, but rather need an infinitely broader basis if they are to be preserved" (op.cit. 147). This broader basis is "the general inclination of the people" (op.cit. 149), which is not to be grasped, however, as a pre-modern mentality, but as a form of life and recognizable as such. The uncanniness that seems to infect the subject as well as the object in a religious context lures in the midst of social life. The two aspects are two sides of the same coin. Response and creative imagination are conditioned by the human form of life.

Now the obvious question would be: What kind of relation, if any, could be made between the later Wittgenstein's *pragmatic* concept of a form of life and Heidegger's use of the same concept as referring to the *ontological* conditions of *Dasein*? Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein speak of the human form of life as a premise. For Wittgenstein this means something which is 'given' in the sense of 'having to be accepted' (PI, II, § 345), whereas for Heidegger it seems to go deeper. The ontological conditions of *Dasein* (as well as the rephrased ex-istence of human beings) are not *given* as something which could also have been otherwise.<sup>303</sup> What is given is part of that which *gives*, that is, Being, in Heidegger's view. Yet, the fundamental concept of Being constitutes a notional ground that is exactly lacking in Wittgenstein's pragmatic reference to our 'form of life'. Far from substituting the grounding role that 'logical order' played in the Tractarian building of language, as it were, it points to the practical and social character of our basic predispositions, including philosophical points of

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<sup>303</sup> See, in this respect, Rorty's slightly ironical critique of Heidegger (1991b, 65): "Heideggerese is only Heidegger's gift to us, not Being's gift to Heidegger".

view. As he puts it in one of his late remarks: “I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house” (1974, § 248). So our actual life is not so much to be understood on the ground of basic concepts as those are to be apprehended in light of our actual life. Whereas this point of view leans towards the early Heidegger’s notion of factic life experience, it is hardly reconcilable with the fundamental form of phenomenology in *Sein und Zeit*, where Heidegger commits himself to an ontological difference (between the ontic and the ontological, 1993, 52).<sup>304</sup> This difference can further be brought out by comparing Wittgenstein’s notion of a ‘perspicuous representation’ as being important for our becoming aware of the way in which we have a tendency to relate things to one another (PO, 133; PI § 122). In the context of the early remarks on Frazer, where the notion appears for the first time (i.e., in 1930), he uses it partly in order to make us aware how influenced our view of other cultures is by a certain ‘Worldview’ (*Weltanschauung*) in Spengler’s sense (PO, 133). Thus, when Frazer aims for an hypothesis that can explain the development from magic to religion, and ascribes a pseudo-scientific intention to the former, he is blinded by a contemporary rationalism that prevents him from recognizing that what science and magic have in common is not a theoretical attempt to explain the world, but a form of life, a way of being in the world. Thus, the other aspect of a perspicuous representation is to make us aware of the way in which this appears to be so. In Wittgenstein’s own words, what the perspicuous representation “brings about [is] the understanding which consists precisely in the fact that we ‘see the connections’” (ibid.). That we see a connection between what goes on in our own lives and in a foreign culture tells us something about our form of life: that transcultural recognition works in a certain way, that translation between languages is possible. But it would be a misunderstanding (one that Frazer is guilty of) to regard these connections as representative of an independent truth about the nature of things themselves. We may strive, scientifically, to obtain an empirically rectifiable way of seeing things as they really are, but what we may overlook in the process is the impact of our being trained to see them thus, abstracted from our actual engagement with them. Obviously, Heidegger would agree on this point. What we encounter in our lives is not simply some available objects for disengaged understanding (1993, 50), and with regard to anthropological investigations in cultural plurality, he even writes that

The syncretistic comparison and classification of everything does not of itself give us genuine essential knowledge [*echte Wesenserkenntnis*]. Subjecting the manifold to tabulation does not guarantee a real understanding of what has been ordered. (1996, 48; cf. 1993, 52)

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**304** Thus, he writes that “Leben ist weder pures Vorhandensein, noch aber auch Dasein. Das Dasein wiederum ist ontologisch nie so zu Bestimmen, dass man es ansetzt als Leben – (ontologisch unbestimmt) und als überdies noch etwas anderes”, 1993, 50.

This remark may at first glance seem at odds with Wittgenstein's view. Does he not attempt to subject the complexity of "life and behavior of mankind throughout the world" (PO, 129) to a perspicuous representation? Indeed he does, but not in search of a 'genuine understanding of essence' (*echte Wesenserkenntnis*). Instead, he tries to open our eyes to the way in which familiarize ourselves with the world and orientate ourselves in it (cf. above, p. 86). It is actually Heidegger rather than Wittgenstein who ends up searching for the primordial ground of 'a philosophical understanding' (*Erkenntnis*).<sup>305</sup> From the point of view of a perspicuous representation such a search appears to be merely one way among others of looking for a primordial ground. What we – and Heidegger – end up with is not, therefore, the ground itself, but a form of life that 'upholds' it.<sup>306</sup> Seeing aspects of our own experiences reflected in either a magic ritual, a mythical view of the world, or Augustine's confession to God (collocated by Wittgenstein himself, PO, 119 ff), makes us aware what human beings have in common, not so much by way of Being or by way of certain numinous emotions, but by way of sharing a human form of life, being the social and language-using creatures that we are.

Several objections might be raised against this philosophical perspective. Firstly, what argument should convince us of preferring 'form of life' to 'being' or 'emotion', and secondly, what does a vague concept of 'form of life' tell us more specifically about religion (including myth and magic)? Responding to such questions, it bears repeating that by speaking about 'form of life', one of Wittgenstein's aims may have been to problematize the unquestioned propensity of asking for basic concepts in the first place, as if they were somehow exempt from the flow of life they are supposed to capture in objectivity (again, the early Heidegger comes very close to taking a similar point of view). To prefer 'form of life' over and against 'being', 'emotion' or any other *prima principia*, is first of all to abstain from a final reference (or *Letz-begründungen*, as Habermas would say). "If the true is what is grounded", the late Wittgenstein muses, "then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false" (1974, § 205). Transposed to Heidegger's endeavor to revive the question of *being* (addressed by Plato in *The Sophist*, Soph. 244a), it means that regardless of what he succeeds in showing, he has, at the same time, renounced the ability to ground it in a form of truth that is not already included in its own perspective. Setting aside the criterion of truth (*Wahrheit*) as agreement ('Übereinstimmung', 1993, 215) between knowledge and the state of affairs (cf. *adaequatio intellectus et rei*), inasmuch as Heidegger finds this 'agree-

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<sup>305</sup> See, in this respect, Rorty, 1991b, 52.

<sup>306</sup> One may object that the very concept of 'a form of life', as Wittgenstein presents it, is nothing but another philosophical foundation. It has to be pointed out as significant, in this respect, though, that Wittgenstein never bothers to define it, which would, in fact, be self-refuting, if my interpretation holds. Rather, the concept of 'a form of life' serves to direct our attention to the indefinable and open-ended form of our human ways, various uses of language included.



ment' to be secondary to the original meaning of ἀλήθεια as 'unconcealment' or 'discoveredness' (*Unverborgenheit* or *Entdecktheit*, op.cit. 219), he is prepared to reckon that "the discoveredness of innerworldly beings is *grounded* in the disclosedness of the world [*gründet in in der Erschlossenheit der Welt*]" (1996, 203; cf. 1993, 220). Although this 'grounding' claim, as it were, can barely pretend to be of the same kind as 'the groundedness', it speaks of, it cannot reasonably see itself as independent of it either. In other words, the meaning of truth as 'unconcealment of beings' (*Unverborgenheit des Seienden*), which is a recurrent theme in Heidegger's later writings as well (cf. 1980, 43), is an *interpreted* and self-including meaning. This is, however, the whole point, namely that the criteria for judging something to be in agreement with something else cannot be part of the same judgment, but precedes it as a way in which the world speaks to us. 'Truth' only looks like a predicate in Heidegger's thinking; in fact, it is a subject, according to which beings are viewed in light of their being (or Being as such) rather than in light of their properties. Nevertheless, the force of this thought has to be paid for with the prize of a certain semantic 'emptiness'. The concept of 'truth' appears *to be* the revealing expression of Being, but in fact only claims it. The concept as such does not entail anything.<sup>307</sup> Heidegger has drawn a self-including circle around his understanding of what it means to-be-in-the-world.<sup>308</sup>

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**307** Heidegger's concept of truth may, nonetheless, be said to *point*. Though it may not itself disclose anything, it is used significantly in representing the idea of *disclosedness*, not unlike the ineffable idea of the logical order of language in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

**308** A similar worry is found in Tugendhat's elaborate investigation of Heidegger's concept of truth (1970). Surely, Heidegger realized, not unlike Wittgenstein's (op.cit. § 205), that the attempt to ground an originary concept of truth in the disclosedness of Being (cf. shifting between concepts of *Entdecktheit*, *Erschlossenheit*, and *Unverborgenheit*), could not express this disclosedness by means of the ordinary concept of truth (implying the principle of conformity between the representing and the represented), inasmuch as the former was the condition of possibility for the latter. That truth, then, in its originary sense, is identical to pure discovering (*Entdecken*), means that falsehood is, symmetrically, to be conceived as a 'covering up' (*Verdecken*), cf. Tugendhat, op.cit. 333. However, as Tugendhat points out, Heidegger's concept of 'discovering' borrows from the Greek ἀποφαίνεσθαι, according to which any proposition, whether false or true, represents something *as something* (ibid.). Therefore, Heidegger himself acknowledges that even 'in the mode of semblance' (cf. *im Modus des Scheins*) Being is disclosed (*entdeckt*) as well as disguised (*verstellt*, SuZ, § 44, p. 222). This means, however, that 'truth' in its originary sense cannot be identified with disclosing or discovering (*Entdecken*) pure and simple. Tugendhat concludes, rightfully I think, that Heidegger in fact uses the word in a double sense which does not permit him to distinguish intelligibly between ἀλήθευειν and ἀποφαίνεσθαι (ibid.), an ambiguity which Tugendhat wants to do away with by making a distinction between 'showing' (*Aufzeigen*), according to which there can be either true or false propositions, and 'disclosing' (*Entdecken*), which is another word for 'being true', op.cit. 340. I am not sure, however, that Heidegger would have welcomed the neatness of this distinction inasmuch as he did, in fact, recognize the intrinsic ambivalence in 'truth', the essence of which was an original strife (*Urstreit*) "in dem jene offene Mitte erstritten wird, in die das Seiende hereinsteht und aus der es sich in sich selbst zurückstellt" (1980, 41). The truth of Being is that it uncovers itself in the same movement by which it regains its

Cassirer reacts sternly towards what he thus sees as a withdrawal into a self-enclosing image of the world characteristic of mythical thinking. He thus points out that Heidegger's view of 'primitive *Dasein*' (i.e., the *Dasein* of tribal societies) almost looks "as if it were a retreat into a primitive and quasi-mythic mode of understanding"(cf. Gordon, 2010, 237). Contrary to this 'Gegenaufklärung' (counter-enlightenment) which, in Cassirer's eyes, revealed Heidegger's anti-modern inclination, Cassirer saw his own line of thinking to be in agreement with the development of modernity: "the concept of philosophy", he writes, "attains its full power and purity only where the world view expressed in linguistic and mythical concepts is abandoned, where it is in principle overcome" (1957, 16). Emphasizing this point of view in "dialectic opposition" to myth (op.cit. 27), he gains a distance that enables him to judge it from external standards. Yet this is exactly what Heidegger finds problematic. As Peter Gordon puts it:

Accordingly, while Cassirer saw scientific 'reduction' as the highest station of symbolization, Heidegger could only regard the movement – from the hermeneutic field of existential involvement to the scientific ideal of present-at-hand [*Vorhanden*] 'objectivity' – as a reduction in significance. And, whereas Cassirer saw reduction as synonymous with cultural achievement and epistemic gain, Heidegger saw it as evidence of existential impoverishment, as what he termed an 'unworlding' of the world (Gordon, 2010, 249).

The disagreement concerning 'what grounds what' is clearly rooted in a basic and unsurmountable difference between the two philosophers. What is at stake is nothing less than basic questions about the task and nature of philosophy. In this respect, Cassirer comes close to the stance of Habermas, for whom philosophy, rather than meddling directly with any scientific or existential questions, stands to reflect on the conditions of possibility for the actual development of rational learning processes. Habermas shares Cassirer's view that myth represents a phase of thinking in which the totality of semantic interrelations precludes such processes. The reason for this, as they both see it, is that myth basically inhibits a critical differentiation between culture and nature. A significant difference, however, is that Habermas refrains from speaking directly in evolutionary terms. Instead of regarding the development of a rational worldview as implicitly teleological, he merely sets out to reconstruct the logical conditions behind the differentiation of criteria of validity that has *actually taken place*. As we have seen, he does not locate the crucial *dynamics* in this respect

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cover. Yet, not only is the predicative meaning of truth thereby exchanged with a substantiation of truth, but the way in which this substantiation is recognised resonates with the *epifani*, as well as the withdrawal, of the divine in mysticism. That being said, it is important to understand that the way of thinking which led Heidegger to this 'divinization' of truth implied, at one and the same time, the need to precede the predicative criteria of propositional truth as well as *the articles of faith* underlying theological or mystical thought.

in an intrinsic phylogenetic drive to construct the world in ever more conceptually advanced ways. What he focuses on is rather the *communicative conditions* of cultural reproduction with their intrinsic appeal to reaching agreement among language users (above, and 1981, II). Though Habermas is not insensitive to Heidegger's point about existential impoverishment, he shares the critique of his 'Seinsfrage' as embracing a 'paganism' that doesn't avoid irrational implications (1998, 168).<sup>309</sup>

For Heidegger such distinction between rationality and irrationality is un-thinking. If thinking shall be able to discern the basic conditions of our being in the world, it cannot stop at some derived conditions of rationality (as, for instance, the principle of *adaequatio intellectus et rei*); it cannot even, as we have seen, stop at the level of conceptuality. That thinking may thus in the process take leave of philosophy is a consequence it must be willing to accept. This is a stance which actually brings Wittgenstein and Heidegger (as well as Otto) closer to one another, than to Cassirer and Habermas. However, the late Wittgenstein still differs profoundly from Heidegger by embracing the thought that philosophical reflection (or thinking) loses the ability to secure its own foundation the moment it realizes the game-character of language (including rational language games such as logics, mathematics, and causal explanations). Though Heidegger surely acknowledged the elusive character of Being as a 'ground', he nevertheless kept *thinking about it*, holding fast to it, even while embracing a notion of 'serenity' (*Gelassenheit*). Though it would be unfair to characterize this 'counter-conceptual concept' of Being as mythical (see above, note 308), it undeniably retains a mystical air. More importantly perhaps, it begs the question whether it might not require 'a Martin Heidegger' to *think* it in a way strict enough to sustain its trans-mystical character. Without denying the authenticity of Heidegger's own calling (that is, his being called to thinking,<sup>310</sup> the problematic implications of his archaizing tendencies notwithstanding), I find it too demanding to repeat and defend *as a calling* on general philosophical grounds. Hence, instead of seeing the present investigation as being already engaged with – as well as *by* – Being, as if in a religious vocation, I regard Heidegger's conceptualization of Being as the opening up of an engaging view. It is neither Being as such nor language as such that speaks through the sentences of the present book, though these are, of course, instances of being and language. Yet they are spoken by (an authorial) me, who aims to find my way about in the medium of conceptuality.

The price paid for this stance, however, actually seems to be somewhat like a 'dialectic opposition' to myth and religion, as welcomed by Cassirer, but not unreservedly intended in the present study. I acknowledge that the problem for a philosophy of religion may, in this respect, seem to be that it endorses a commitment to conceptual criteria, which Heidegger might be right to call 'unworlding', and that it therefore

<sup>309</sup> For a similar critique by Lévinas (cf. Moyn, 1998, 25 ff) and Cassirer (cf. Gordon, 2010, 245).

<sup>310</sup> The German title *Was Heisst Denken?* thus carries the connotation of 'calling'.

also seems to buy into an evolutionary perspective (including Habermas), whether it likes it or not. From the point of view of a ‘distinguishing’ conceptuality, myth is seen as a closed system of symbolic interrelations. But who is to say that the focus on ‘symbol’ and ‘concept’ does not distort the matter altogether?<sup>311</sup> Wittgenstein may be seen to warn against this danger (at least in the remarks on Frazer). Or rather he turns the perspective on its head by regarding our concepts, our language, as imbedded in myth. Not that this reference to myth *explains* anything, but it shows us how everyone’s immediate engagement with their *surroundings* (environment, people, world) unfolds in a social and linguistic matrix; it did then as it does now. Taking the point of departure in a principal (not to say metaphysical) concept, whether it is ‘being’, ‘emotion’ or ‘rationality’, does not escape this condition. Referring to the condition of our social interaction does not ‘ground’ anything, but rather makes us aware of ‘un-groundedness’. This is what I take the anti-conceptual concept of ‘form of life’ to imply, somewhat paradoxically, in later Wittgenstein.

Yet where does it leave us in respect of the second question raised above, that is, what may our awareness of being imbedded in a ‘form of life’ tell us specifically about religion? I am not sure that it *tells* us anything in particular, but it may make a world of difference. Contrary to the more or less compartmentalist view among the so-called neo-Wittgensteinians (such as Rush Rhees, Norman Malcolm, Stewart R. Sutherland, and D.Z. Phillips), I don’t think that the reference to ‘form of life’ opens up for defining the confines of religion. At least Wittgenstein himself never intended to define religion as a form of life in contrast to other forms of life.<sup>312</sup>

What ‘form of life’ may indicate in relation to religion is rather an abstaining from regarding religious ‘life and behavior’ by means of concepts more basic than this way of life itself. The point would rather be that the effort to ground a religious form of life in a certain game of language, certain emotions, or forms of being, diverts our attention from the premise that any perspective on life is already part of the form of life lived by the spectators. What may be regarded as ‘religious’ in one context, may be regarded as something else in another. We may say, for instance, that from a certain point of view the question about being has a religious connotation, whereas

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**311** One might think of the jokey, if not even ironical, attitude towards symbolic manifestations and ritual obligations among indigenous people, cf. Geertz, 1993, 119; Willerslev, 2013, 50 f.

**312** Others have tried to utilize Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance in order to exchange an essential definition of religion with “unbounded analytical categories”, as, for instance, Benson Saler (1993, 254 ff) and Peter Byrne (1988, 10). Notwithstanding the pragmatic merits of this strategy, it has to be made clear whether we are talking about a communicative behavior in general (as Wittgenstein did) or about the stipulation of scientific concepts. Leaving aside the specific agenda of a ‘philosophical seminar’, Timothy Fitzgerald directs an unrelenting critique against the attempt to draw theoretical points about the definition of religion from the concept of family resemblance, 1996, 215 ff. Unfortunately, his own strategy of exchanging the concept of ‘religion’ with ‘values’ and ‘culture’ does not solve the conceptual issues at stake.

from another point of view it rather has a critical bearing on metaphysical reification. If the search for something *ultimately real*, only to be glimpsed beyond and before conceptuality, is a religious search, then Heidegger's concept of Being is a religious concept. If, however, a religious concept is religious because of an underlying claim to an absolute source of unquestionable authority, then Heidegger's concept of Being is anything but religious. Wittgenstein himself admitted a tendency to regard every problem from a religious point of view, but denied to be a religious person (cf. above p. 127). The implied meaning of 'religion' obviously differs in various adjectival conceptions such as 'religious belief', 'religious congregation', 'religious inclination', 'religious language', 'religious doctrine', 'religious attitude', 'religious rhetoric', and so on. Likewise, speaking about sports or Marxism as being instances of 'religion' differs from speaking about Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity as 'religions'. This doesn't entail that 'religion' is a meaningless concept or that it is barely more than an empty *signifiant flottant* (to use an expression by Lévi-Strauss). What it means, from the point of view of Wittgenstein's *language games*, is rather that it is used unproblematically in various contexts, integrated in a web of meanings that doesn't *require* a substantial definition. It would be a misunderstanding, on the other hand, to conclude from this 'openness' of the game that it has no rules, that *nothing* can be characteristic of religion. As I have tried to show, the way in which 'truth' functions in a religious language apparently differs from the way it functions in science and associable language-games within a demystified worldview. The expressive dimension of language, as in Benjamin's conception of *the name*, is another example of a use of language which is more pertinent in religion than in empirically committed discourses. Returning to the main question of this chapter, the issue would be: what form does the world take in myth and religion? However, a distinction, which has perhaps been postponed for too long, must be made if at all possible, namely a distinction between myth and religion.

In Cassirer, we read that:

Religion takes the decisive step that is essentially alien to myth: in its use of sensuous images and signs it recognizes them as such – a means of expression which, though they reveal a determinate meaning, must necessarily remain inadequate to it (PSF, II, 239).

In Cassirer's opinion, the step that religion takes away from myth is a step in the evolutionary process towards the critical conceptuality of science and philosophy. This notion, widespread within the study of religion, is also reflected in Gershom Scholem's presentation of Jewish mysticism (cf. above, note 240). Yet, we may ask ourselves: How can he know? That we find conceptual musings within the specific context of doctrines and theological philosophy does not entitle us to generalize on behalf of religion as such, let alone allow us to regard it as a safe clue to some evolutionary tendency. Even if we admit that an explicit view of representation *as representation* is characteristic of science and philosophy, how can we be sure that 'sensuous

images' are, in every religious context, regarded as *merely* representative and, therefore, essentially inadequate? And how can Cassirer infer a teleological drive behind this alleged 'demythification'? In fact, he can't. At best, he may regard it as a tendency which is in continuity with a worldview of his own. It goes without saying that we have a whole tradition of theological reflections which is in line with Cassirer's view of religion, but if a philosophy of religion is supposed to encompass more than, or is something different from, a philosophy of theological reflection, the matter has to be spelt out differently, or at least other aspects needs to be taken into account.

During a lecture about religious belief, Wittgenstein and his pupil Lewy discuss the nature of the belief in life after death. Using the hypothetical utterance 'We might see one another after death' as a way of saying goodbye to someone whom one never expects to meet again (in this life), Wittgenstein denies that such utterance is likely to express a certain attitude (1970, 71). Instead of conveying anything, Wittgenstein claims, it may stand for what it is, that is, a picture.<sup>313</sup> In the same way, a religious person may have a certain picture before his mind (as, for instance, a picture of 'doomsday', 'the all-seeing eye of God', or of 'being held in the arms of Christ') when she acts in certain ways or experiences certain incidents. Conclusively, Wittgenstein says that "[t]he whole *weight* may be in the picture" (op.cit. 72). But how far is this from carrying out a magical ritual as, for instance, burning something in effigy (PO, 123)? In Wittgenstein's view there may be only a very slight difference, if any at all. That he compares 'burning in effigy' with 'kissing the picture of one's beloved' (ibid.) goes to show this.

Wittgenstein's point notwithstanding, there may still be something to be said for Cassirer's characterization of religion. It would be far-fetched, as well as completely beside the point, to claim that religious belief doesn't entail anything *but* a certain picture of things. However, the same reservation would probably apply to myth and magic as well. The point is rather that a symbolic expression (be it of religion, myth or magic) does not merely represent a former – or less enlightened – attitude towards things. It sticks with us, recognizable in our own engagement with the world. Yet, the societal and linguistic complexity has evolved far beyond the social settings of a tribal society. So it goes without saying that the consciousness of 'things' have changed on a large scale. There is nothing wrong with suggesting, as Cassirer does, that we find in religion, probably as an essential part of what happened in the Axial age, a *tendency* to regard various notions and idioms (such as the 'virginity of Mary', 'the eye of

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**313** Wittgenstein's point may recall Benjamin's concept of symbol, which may be partly inspired by Kabbalist thought. Scholem renders the thought thus that "[t]he symbol 'signifies' nothing and communicates nothing, but makes something transparent which is beyond all expression", 1995, 27. However, there is a profound difference between regarding this condition as an insufficiency of language, as ascribed to Kabbalist thought by Scholem, and regarding it as *the communicable inexpressible*, as Benjamin seems to do in line with a more Wittgensteinian way of thinking.

God', 'God as a father', 'the ascension of Christ') as insufficient means of pointing to a non-conceptual transcendent truth. Or to put it in different terms: the emerging tradition of theological dogmatism was supposedly neither identical with, nor entirely separate from, 'the general inclination of the people', to use Wittgenstein's phrase. However, when gradual changes take place on a general level, it should not immediately tempt us to explain it as the development of 'higher and purer expressions' (*höheren und reineren Ausdrücke*) as Otto does (1936, 18), and it should not be taken as expressing an undeviating development of conceptual maturity, as Cassirer does (1957, 27). It might simply be regarded as an evolving complexity of language games, fostered to a high degree by an extensive discursive interaction.

The question is, however, to what extent we should actually strive to differentiate religion from myth? If we resist the temptation to turn myth into a counter-reflection of modern conceptuality, we may recognize it in the midst of our current being-in-the-world, however suppressed or transformed it appears to be. And then religion may supposedly still be a context in which this mythical 'attitude' is more likely to show than in science and philosophy. That is, at any rate, an issue for further assessment.

In sum, I lean towards Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's view that we should seek our understanding of human dispositions in the general conditions of life and being, rather than in the specificities of various developmental phases of emotions and concepts. I shall therefore return once more to the perspective laid out, most prominently by Heidegger, in order to suggest, by way of an admittedly objectifying conceptuality, how the general conditions of being-in-the-world might be reflected in a specifically religious conception of being-in-the-world.

## 6.5 Occupying an Earthly Abode, but Dwelling in the Beyond

In a paper from 1951, Heidegger speaks about the human 'act of building' (*Bauen*) as the premise of 'dwelling' (*Wohnen*) in the world, and couples it with Being by way of referring 'bauen' etymologically back to (Ich) '*bin*' (I *am*, 1954b, 147). Thus, "[b]uilding as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth [...] remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset 'habitual' – we inhabit it, as language says so beautifully: it is the *Gewohnte*" (ibid.; cf. 1978, 349). Listening "to what language says to us", Heidegger further reflects on the meaning of 'bauen' (related to the Gothic *wunian* and the Old Saxon *wuon*) as "to remain, to stay in place" (op.cit. 350), as well as "to be brought to peace. To remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, das *Frye*, and *fry* means preserved from harm and danger, preserved *from* something, safeguarded" (op.cit. 351). A reference can, and probably should, be made to his earlier musing on 'Aufenthalt' as guaranteed by that which is up-holding something (cf. 'Haltbar'). This 'halt' or 'rest', linked with 'Hut' (*Shelter*) and 'hüten' (*guarding*), is provided not only by the daily work, nourishment, and the physical residence of the home, but also, and significantly, with *language* as 'that in which the essence



of human beings resides' (*Behausung des Wesens des Menschen*, cf. above). "It is language that tells us about the essence of a thing", Heidegger says in his 1951 paper, "provided that we respect language's own essence" (op.cit. 348), and he continues:

Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of this relation of dominance *that drives his essential being into alienation* [*was sein Wesen in das Unheimische treibt*]." (ibid., cf. 1954b, 146)

When it is forgotten that language is not simply *at our disposal*, that it is not basically *a means* of expressing our experience of being-in-the-world, but rather the way in which this being is housed, brought to rest and given a home, as it were, the uncanny lurks immediately below the surface. According to Stanley Cavell's reading of Heidegger's papers from the early 50's, Heidegger had clearly sensed "a growing violence in our demand to grasp or explain the world" (1988, 159), reflecting its alienation, i.e., a disintegration of 'dwelling'. The point taken up by Cavell is the consequence that this attempt to master the world has had in the form of skepticism. And skepticism is exactly, in Cavell's view (inspired fundamentally by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) a corollary of language having become estranged from the use of language itself. Doubting any grounding determinacy of meaning, skepticism has, so to speak, stolen from language what must – in a philosophical counter-movement – be brought back to it as everydayness, by accepting in actual practice the ungrounded, yet ceaseless, separateness and repetition (op.cit. 176). Philosophy of the ordinary can therefore, so Cavell, be seen as a response to skepticism and its "threat of world-consuming doubt by means of its own uncanny homeliness, stubbornly resting within its relentless superficiality" (1988, 176). Skepticism is in no position to better secure 'the ground' it pulls from under the housing abode of language, and it therefore remains a 'relentless superficiality'. It is, moreover, an 'uncanny homeliness' because it pretends a familiarity with the condition of meaning which is, at the same time, hollowed out, as if it were not containing, or housing, anything. Seen in this light, the uncanniness of skepticism can be related, for instance, to the theme of unsettling alienation pervading Gothic literature.<sup>314</sup>

The haunted mansion thus presents a recurrent theme of 'home' that has become uninhabitable. Housing ghosts rather than living inhabitants, it takes back its character as *home*, unfolding its own dark abode in displacement of the visible functions of daily life. More precisely, it becomes another *kind of home* by haunting (*heim-suchen*)

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**314** Cavell mentions Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe (op.cit. 175), and also draws attention to modern tragedy and melodrama, in which a recurrent theme is the insecure or threatened "dependence of the human self on society for its definition", which is, at the same time, "its transcendence of that definition, its infinite insecurity in maintaining its existence", op.cit. 174. This obviously recalls the thematic from Heidegger's early musings on 'Bekümmern'.

those who *ordinarily* live there. Alternatively, a decaying ‘home’ may be identified with its alienated or degenerate inhabitants as in Poe’s brilliant short story *The Fall of the House of Usher*, where the crumbling stones of the mansion clearly mirrors the deranged mind of Usher and his mad, ghostlike sister, Madelaine. When the latter reappears from her grave, having been buried immaturely, it is only to draw her brother with her into a shared tomb of the collapsing, imploding structure of their mansion. Thus, Poe turns a living abode into a realm of the dead, sensing perhaps the duality of dwelling which also permeates a mythical, or religious, topography. The Ushers, however, are without religion. What haunts them seems to be the ambiguity, the uncanniness, of the world itself, their inability to inhabit it. In this light, religion can be seen as the lost ability (at least for the Ushers of this world) to embrace the uncanny, to inhabit the world.<sup>315</sup>

Poe’s more somber outlook aside, Gothic literature is typical for having the ‘ordinary and sheltering light of day’ conventionally restored either by rationally divulging a play of illusions, or by mythically driving out the ‘ghost’ in order to let it rest in peace. In language, infected by the virulence of skepticism, there is no means of conventionally restoring ‘the peace’, as it were, but an antidote is found, nevertheless, in the ordinarieness, the everydayness, of its use. However, like the ground of Nothingness, which opens up the possibilities of mortal being, language may, at any moment, reveal its ‘other side’, not merely the superficial insecurity fostered by skepticism, but the fundamental uncanniness – unhomeliness – of meaninglessness (as in repeating a word enough times to make it sound strange and empty). What guards us against Nothingness, the unknown, or that which has no name, is, at the same time, that which is nameless and unknown, leading us towards the abyss of death and nothingness. “Headed towards death language turns back upon itself”, Foucault says, “it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits.” (1977b, 54)

It goes without saying that this recognition may strictly speaking belong to modernity. Yet, Foucault also finds an intimation of it in Homeric poetry:

It is quite likely, as Homer has said, that the gods send disasters to men so that they can tell of them [...] it is quite likely that the approach of death – its sovereign gesture, its prominence within human memory – hollows out in the present and in existence the void toward which and from which we speak (ibid.).

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**315** The symbolic as well as practical concern for making oneself a home in the world in light of a supreme order of things is brought out, for instance, in Thomas Tweed’s theory of religion as an institutionalized way of ‘crossing and dwelling’, 2006. The shadow of terrestrial being, either in the form of an underworld or a celestial abode, is thus given *a name* in religion.

In other words, that which provides human beings with a home in the world, or rather: makes the world a home, namely, language, is, at the same time, that which opens up the opposite, the opposite *of* a home (as seen in the light of day) or the *opposite home* (as seen in the dark of the night), the uncanny home – or un-home – of the haunted castle as well as the gloomy and icy abode of Hades among the ancient Greeks (Albinus, 2000, 74). A plethora of examples can be found in religion (as, for instance, the realm of shadows in the Semitic Sheol, or the circles of Hell in Dante's *Divina Comedia*). To exemplify this play between the ordinary – that is, home and daily sustenance – and the uncanny, yet religiously framed, opposite, I shall turn to a well-known story from the Greek myth.

In Ancient religion, we often witness a poetic justice, which expresses a form of punishment that fits the crime and goes to make an uncanny – or 'unhomely' – representation of the ordinary habitation of mortals. When Tantalus, for instance, is punished in the underworld by having to reach in vain for fruits and water (retreating whenever he reaches out for them in hunger and thirst), it reflects his offense of stealing nectar and ambrosia (i.e., 'immortal' food) from the Olympians (with the purpose of making his fellow men immortal). To make things worse, he also served the body of his own son at a dinner party to which the same gods were invited. Tantalus has obviously transgressed the ethos (seat, norm) of a human meal – by seeking to engender immortality as well as enacting cannibalism – and as a consequence he pays the price of being condemned to an uninhabitable abode in which the basic life-supplies of food and water is interminably out of reach. What makes the image uncanny is the fact that although Tantalus is 'dead' to the world in the sense that he is deported to Tartarus, he still seems to have the needs of the living, that is, those who literally *spend their lives on earth*. The 'other home', the 'un-home' of Tartarus, is but an uncanny representation of life in the upper world, blessed by the light of day.

Pindar, who is our main source to this tale, actually praises the 'fruitful' (πολύμαλος) Sicily, ruled by the tyrant Hieron who is also the addressee of the poem (1. *Olympian Ode*, 12). Later in the poem Pindar also emphasizes the 'prosperity' (ὄλβος, 56) that Tantalus enjoyed prior to his misdemeanors. The point is that this good fortune didn't prevent him from losing his way. Pindar's epinicion, characteristic of combining praise and exhortation, implicitly cautions Hieron not to overstep his bounds and wish for more than his share. Otherwise, his immediate power and luck (of having being victorious in the Olympian Games) will turn into the opposite. Hence, the fate of Tantalus may for Pindar illustrate the insecurity of human life by resembling it in an uncanny, and dysfunctional, way.

If skepticism believes itself to be the realization that nothing is what it appears to be (cf. Cavell, 1988, 158), then it can be seen as a secular and epistemic version of the 'moral' point in Pindar's tale, namely, insofar as the latter might be a way of saying, in a religious language, that *Nothing* is what it appears to be: For Tantalus the world as we know it turns into an un-home in which sustenance and metabolism become nothing but a mirage. On the other hand, the name of 'nothing' in philosophy is rather

a name *drained of naming*, a mere repetition of ‘nothing’. In myth and religion the name *names* a realm of the beyond. Or as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it: “religion fills in the nothing” (2013, 15).<sup>316</sup> Nothing *becomes* something as, for instance, in Dao De Jing, where Dao is *Nothing*, that is, the non-existence (and non-form) from which existence (and form) springs (chapter 40).<sup>317</sup> The same can be said of Kabbala mysticism where YHWH is conceived as *Nothing* who in ‘his’ internal withdrawal from ‘himself’ creates a world, ‘he’ can relate to.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, a comparably intrinsic sense of nothingness is referred to as the third *āyatana* (meditative state) of the early yogins. This ‘nothingness’ was not conceived as another form of being, leading to ‘something’, but rather thought of as a state of non-being (cf. Armstrong, 2000, 55). Similar experiences are reported among Jewish, Christian and Muslim mystics and may be said to exemplify a certain way of internalizing that ‘non-home’ which regularly finds its alternative expression in images of afterlife and the underworld.

Speaking of the latter, ‘nothing’ is indeed regarded *as something* in the depth of the earth, the realm of the dead, from which new life springs in the form of crops and rebirth. As much as Chthonian powers may take life’s support *away*, they also engender everything, incorporating the image of the divine Night, a prosperous source hidden in an impenetrable darkness of the beyond. Yet, this beyond is exactly *nothing* in and by itself (philosophically speaking), and takes on meaning (and imagery) only

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**316** Speaking about human brains from his stance in cognitive psychology, Pascal Boyer apparently hits a similar note by making the following *sortie* in his *Religion Explained*: “One does learn a lot about these complex biological machines by figuring out how they manage to give airy nothing a local habitation and a name”, 2002, 379. Without denying the feasibility of gaining crucial knowledge about our mental dispositions from an empirical point of view, the stance taken in the present investigation is the exact opposite of Boyer’s inasmuch as philosophy does not have its primary focus in objectification (whether of thinking or anything else), but in self-reflection and conceptual clarification. This means that the question as to the ‘how’ of giving something ‘a habitation and a name’ is asked at another level. Philosophy, at least in the sense that I advocate for, does not search for a certain capacity in the brain that makes imaginative powers believable, but rather try to understand why and how human beings are concerned with habitation and name-giving from a point of view that includes philosophy itself. In this perspective, Boyer’s ‘airy nothing’ comes uncannily close to the ground upon which we all stand ourselves, whether we take our standpoint in thinking or in empirical science. The crucial question is not how *the* ‘airy nothing’ is given a *local* habitation, but how ‘nothingness’ as such permeates the very fibres of our being, how it inclines us, our empirical attitudes included, to make an habitation *of the world* that we live – and die – in. In this respect, it is far more interesting *that* religion stands out by giving ‘the airy nothing’ a local habitation than how it actually manages to do it (by way of mental dispositions).

**317** “All things under heaven sprang from It [Dao] as existing and named. That existence sprang from It as non-existent and not named”, translated by James Legge in 1891. However, Dao, which is *Nothing* is, at the same time, also *Something*, cf. Dao De Jing Chapter 25.

**318** As in the words of Scholem: “To the Kabbalist the fundamental fact of creation takes place in God [...] The creation of the world, that is to say, the creation of something out of nothing, is itself but the external aspect of something which takes place in God Himself”, 1995, 217.

in relation to being ‘the other’ of this world (an ‘otherness’ which can be expressed as a *dwelling* upon – and yet beyond – our own dwelling). Another expression of this is found in *Vedānta* philosophy, where a myth tells us about a fool, who wanted to expand his wealth. He said to himself: “I belong to empty space; I am empty space; empty space is mine. I will protect space; I will establish space firmly; and I myself will assiduously protect my cherished possession” (Yogavasishtha 6.1.112.16–35, cf. Doniger, 2015, 293). Then he built a house, the story goes, to protect his empty space, and he exclaimed: “Now I have protected this empty space”.

And he took pleasure in that space in the house. But in the course of time, that house of his was destroyed, as a little wave in the water is destroyed by a wind in the season of autumn. (ibid.)

The fool continues to build other spaces, but each of them is destroyed in turn.

Thus time, whose essence never changes, outstripped his house, four-halled palace, pot, bowl, and granary. And thus he remained, powerless in his cave in a corner of the sky, coming and going in his own mind from one impenetrable house to another, from one misery, one cloud to another cloud that has become a source of misery, deluded by the confusion between what had gone and what never come. (ibid.)

The fool was procured by “a machine of illusion” and represents every ordinary human being who is incapable of understanding the nature of being, the real foundation of power and wealth, which is the inner nature of everything. Instead she succumbs to the illusion of the world, trying to make a house, a home, out of emptiness (cf. note 257). In *Vedānta* nothingness has become the inner truth, a fulfilment of everything. The soul will find no security in the illusory manifestations and distinctions of the material world, but only in – and by realizing – *brahman*, the unchanging reality amidst and beyond the world.

We find the same circumvention of earthly and heavenly life, mortality and immortality, in Orphic theology. Life on earth is the ‘real’ death, and by the ritual imitation of death in life (cf. Albinus, 2000, 141–152), Orphic initiation serves to free the soul from coming incarnations (μετεμψύχωσις), corresponding to the *Vedānta Saṃsāra*. Thus, when the Orphic initiands are later buried, they carry *Gold Tablets* around their neck. These tablets constitute thin leaves engraved with small pieces of text representing the ‘I’ of the deceased who proclaims to have come from the starry heavens and want to return to the real home among the immortals (Orph. B 1.6; B 2.6). A ritual *imitation mortis* has established a contact between this world and another world between which substance and nothingness, reality and unreality, has changed places.

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Exemplifying his point about building as a precondition for dwelling, Heidegger refers to a *bridge*. Significantly, it “does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream” (1978, 354). Moreover,

“[t]he bridge *gathers* to itself in *its own* way earth and sky, divinities and mortals” (op.cit. 355). What Heidegger’s example of the bridge may serve to show (apart from his own specific thought of ‘the quartering’, *Das Geviert*) is that the ‘two worlds’, or duality of being, characteristic of religion, is exactly created by – and dependent on – *the relation*, repeated in myth and ritual, which keeps the spheres apart in the process of connecting them. Thus, under certain semantic restrictions, spatially acted out in cult practice, the inhabitants of the home and the unhome cross the border that normally separates them. This takes place noticeably in incubation oracles and various kinds of puberty rites, not to mention of cults of the dead (e.g. the Greek Antistheria, the Spanish Día de muertos, the Anglo-Saxon All Hallow’s Eve, better known as Halloween). For a limited time, the world of the departed invades the home of the living, and the living are permitted to enter the home of the dead.<sup>319</sup> In modern literature (as in the Gothic novel) or in science, owing to the latter’s imperialization of language, this relation, or *the bridge*, as it were, has evaporated, leaving only traces of uncanny insecurity, the very sustenance of skepticism. What once inhabited a mythical world has become fiction or, at best, heuristic models. This is already reflected in the fundamental ‘inadequacy’ which Cassirer claimed to be part of religion owing to its distinction from myth, but only brought fully to fruition in philosophy and science. Opposing this view, while listening to language, Heidegger aims to show that the conceptual violence, characteristic of the human attempt to master the world rather than to live in it, betrays a forgetfulness rather than a real understanding (*Erkenntnis*) of Being. Adding to this point, one might say that a secularized world view has lost a ‘home’ for the ‘unhomely’, the uncanny, which therefore becomes unsettling in a new unenclosed way. In his lecture *What is called thinking?*, Heidegger asserts that we are not generally disposed to encounter what is ‘near’ (*das Nahe*) but merely what is ‘common’ (*Das Gewöhnliche*). Despite its comforting presence, however, this commonality is characteristic of “the unearthly power to break us of the habit of abiding in what is essential, often so definitively that we never come to abide anywhere” (1968, 129). Giving the German phrases a closer look, we see that Heidegger specifically speaks of “die unheimliche [‘unhomely’] Macht” of ‘the habituary’ [*Das Gewöhnliche*, associated implicitly with ‘the homely’], which de-habituates us from our essential habitation [*uns des Wohnens im Wesenhaften entwöhnt*] (1954a, 88). What Heidegger has in mind, apart from the verbally played out dialectics of ‘habitation’, is the fall of *Dasein* into inauthenticity and the general oblivion of Being, which exchanges real conditionality with the illusion of homely security. The uncanniness, or un-homeliness, of the power, which is nothing but our falling tendency, is exactly its way of countering

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**319** Among the many examples of hero-cults and oracular shrines, involving a descent into the underworld, one may draw attention to the shrine of Trophonius where the applicant undergoes a ritual imitation of a dead soul before entering the chthonic chamber of the semi-god (cf. Paus. 9.39.4–14); Albinus, 2000, 145.

our ability to dwell, to make ourselves a home in the world, in the clearing of our *essential* being. When the Buddha went forth from the comfortableness of his home, he embraced an unhomeliness which – in light of these musings – might be interpreted as nothing but a call from the clearance of Being (cf. Armstrong, 2000, 1).<sup>320</sup>

In institutionalized religion, on the other hand, from myth and magic to the confessional ‘high religions’, the uncanny has been given a home (The *Ungeheure*, to use of one’s Heidegger’s terms, is being included in the *Geheure*): Religion fills in the scary *nothing*. The groundlessness of being gains a ground in the divine. Representing an *unhome* in the midst of human dwellings, the houses of worship – the cathedral, the mosque, the synagogue, the temple – are houses of God, or rather: they are *built to house the God*. From mere holes in the ground to edifices more spectacular than any human dwelling, from tabooed places to open doors, religion constructs ‘abodes’ for the divine, unsuitable and unlivable for the mortals, yet enlivened by a breath of otherness, from dreamlike spirits to self-thinking Spirit.<sup>321</sup> Referring to a Greek temple (in his concern about the origin of works of art), Heidegger points out that:

It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple [...] It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself a unity of those paths and relations [*Bezüge*]

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**320** The inevitable irony, however, that lurks in the shadow of any interpreted instance of ‘authentic decidability’ is, of course, the probably influence of fashion. In Siddhatta Gotama’s example, Armstrong put things in perspective by mentioning: “The thick luxuriant forests that fringed the fertile plain of the Ganges river had become the haunt of thousands of men and even a few women who had all shunned their families in order to seek what they called ‘the holy life’ (*brahmacariya*), and Gotama had made up his mind to join them”, 2000, 2. The paradox is that the very number of people engaging in a common form of life rather makes us think of ‘Das Man’ and the kind of inauthenticity that goes with it in Heideggerian terms, than of *Entschlossenheit*. Moreover, it is quantity that makes this popular ‘going forth’ a visible social phenomenon, or in other words, *a movement*. And from speaking about a spiritual movement to be speaking about religion, there is only a short step. Still, the philosophical point of bringing Heidegger’s thinking to bear on the concept of religion is not to better understand the social side of things, but rather to form an idea of existential proclivities, even though these are as socially embedded as everything else. That being said, legend has it that Siddhatta Gotama became the Buddha, exactly because *he chose his own path*, thus representing a genuine instance of *Eigentlichkeit*.

**321** Referring to the particular place stretching between Jerusalem and Athens, Nancy points out, in a Heideggerian vein, that “two worlds” are opened up, “two regions or regimes of different nature”, namely the ensemble “to which heaven and earth belong, which is the dwelling of both mankind and gods, regardless of the distance that separates them. ‘This world’ implies that there is another world: another order, another laying out of all things and of life or existence, rather than an ‘other life’ beyond, at the distance of God or of devils. In a certain sense, with ‘this world’ there is no longer any totality of beings or any internal distribution of the regions of the all: or rather, there is such an ‘all’, but it is in itself open, it is at the same time entirely consistent in itself, without outside, and open. The beyond is within”, 2013, 27.



in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. (1978, 167, cf. 1980, 27)

The relational meaning (cf. the 'Bezugsinn' of early Heidegger) of the temple is the *building* of a relationship with the god, a building which lets the god stand out, i.e., exist, in the world of human beings. In this sense, the temple corresponds to the bridge which 'gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals'. Contrary to this connection, or connectedness, Heraclitus, as we might remember, declared the gods to be present in the *human* abode, dwelling among daily activities much as the oven-seeking philosopher himself. Another fragment thus reports that he rebuked those who "pray to [...] statues, as if one were to carry on a conversation with houses, not recognizing the true nature of gods or demi-gods" (241, KRS, p. 209). And, in yet another fragment, he says: "The secret rites practiced among men are celebrated in an unholy manner" (242, KRS, *ibid.*). What happens, we might ask, in this transformation of meaning of 'presence' and 'absence' of the gods, of a 'holy' and 'unholy' attitude towards them? In a sense, the shift in association corresponds to a skeptical attitude. Yet at the same time, it confirms a ground. Although nothing ever rests, that is, stays the same, inasmuch as everything is in perpetual flow (cf. πάντα ῥεῖ), it belongs to *logos*, pictured as a changing figure of the everlasting, self-identical *flame*. It is, we might say, another word for *Being*. Yet, the divine presence of Being, placing human beings in the clearing of their appearance, is no longer a *represented* presence in Heraclitus's view of the world. One may even say that it is no longer a *religious* presence, if religion is the institutionalized way of establishing, upholding, and worshipping, a *relation* between two worlds: the residence of the living, on the one hand, and the residence of the dead, the divine beings, of God, on the other. Emptying the house of God makes the divine homeless in the world, or transforms it into nature (φύσις) and being (το ὄν), leaving a trace of itself in the ground of Nothing, reflected in the conditionality of angst which seeks, in vain, something to hold on to, unless it turns into (inauthentic) fear.

What is a stake in Heraclitus, if we can trust the authenticity of the fragments, is a movement we recognize in Heidegger as well, a transformation of a religious symbolism into a philosophical symbolism, an exchange of God with Being.<sup>322</sup> Yet, Heidegger seems to acknowledge, in his late writings, that what thought tries to grasp, in the last instance, tends inevitably to elude it. Instead, thinking might let it itself *be thought* by, or through, things and language on their own accord. Admitting that Being must happen, or must be received rather than grasped, can, of course, still be seen as a sophisticated way of 'grasping' it but may also bear out an increasingly humble preparedness (cf. *Gelassenheit*) to merely *listen* to Being, by giving heed to language. It might be significant, at any rate, that Heidegger's papers of the beginning of the 50's

<sup>322</sup> I venture to suggest, though I cannot pursue the matter here, that the same movement, as part of an overall axial tendency, applies to the advent of Buddhism.

speak very little of Being as such, but concern themselves with meanings *housed in words*, as it were. Speaking about the ‘worlding of the world’, the ‘thinging of the thing’, the ‘essencing of the essence’, Heidegger aims, so it seems, to let Being speak for itself. This near coincidence between Being and language brings Heidegger in close connection with Benjamin and Wittgenstein (at least in his remarks on Frazer) when it comes to apprehending the nature of the religious symbol (cf. Scholem above, note 313). Yet the *social* nature of language, radically perceived by the later Wittgenstein, is still foreign to Heidegger’s way of thinking which still hangs on to something more ‘fundamental’ than the open play of things – *praxis*.<sup>323</sup> Although that which emerges from the late Heidegger’s listening can be brought out in general, and be socially appreciated, so to speak, it is, nonetheless, delivered in solitary form of thinking, exempted from the fallenness of quotidian trivialization. This is, perhaps, *what eventually makes his discourse uncanny*. The ordinary use of words is broken down, warped into a forced openness, a clearing which pretends to be of this world but which does, in fact, bear the ghostly mark of another world, the real – or authentic – *worlding of the world*, claiming a status similar to unrealized despair (*Fortvivlelse*) in Kierkegaard.

Instead of following this route, leading into the vicinities of religion (without exactly *being* religion), we shall take a step back and remain at the ‘safe’ shore of conceptuality, looking at human ways of being in the world, making this world a home for themselves and the immortals, divided by – yet manifesting – the very *relation* which makes up religion. What appears in front of this gaze is a structure of temporal as well as spatial relations, combining the light and the dark side of being, hope and anxiety. Thus, stretched out between seasons, the time of sowing and the time of harvest, we see rites of honoring – and manifesting – the cycle of life, combining the powers of the underworld with the life of mortals. Agrarian rites typically have a double aspect, being therapeutic (securing the beneficial) as well as apotropaic (averting the malignant). In other words, they serve to appease the ambivalent powers of the earthly abyss (*chthon*), housing death as well as life-giving nourishment.<sup>324</sup>

Hence, while reflecting the life-span of mortals, as well as the cycle of generations (Harrison, 1963, 274; Albinus, 2000, 117 ff), the seasonal rites also manifest the spatial differentiation between gods and humans, a differentiation that entails its own ambi-

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**323** Paradoxically, it is no other than Heidegger himself who has brought attention to our practical engagement (with the world) as a point of departure for philosophical reflection. However, this ‘recognition’ seems to inform current philosophy more radically than it actually did Heidegger (cf. Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, Richard Rorty, Peter Sloterdijk, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy just to name a few obvious instances).

**324** The continuity of praxis stretching from the vegetation cults in Ancient Greece to the Panagia-cult in Rural Greece of today (Håland, 2012, 309 ff) shows the persevering character of such rites as well as the regenerative aspects they represent. In fact, I think that this points to a significant inner (socio-existential) core of religion running beneath outward changes of cult and history.

valence. For one thing, the ambiguity of the divine shows in the immanent potential for (skeptical) reinterpretation, perspicuously present in the shifts from mythos to logos in Greece (as, for instance, from Homer to Hesiod or Heraclitus). However, it also pertains to the Janus-face of the godhead itself and as such it corresponds with the double aspect of *tremens* and *fascinans*. This was perhaps what inspired C.G. Jung to seek a psychological, if not spiritual, redemption in Cusanus' 15th Century principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Not incidentally, the renewed interest in religious symbolism such as Jung's came from an investigation of dreams, the nocturnal opposite to daily life. The divinatory interest in dreams, as lying *beyond* our waking state of mind, is probably as old as religion itself, and in antiquity sleep was known as a gateway to 'the realm of the dead', as we have seen in Achilles' encounter with the dream-image of Patroclus (though in actual religious practice it took the ritual form of incubation).

The temporal alteration between night and day, sleeping and being awake, corresponds religiously with the spatial separation between realms of light (Being, Clearing, World, Home) and realms of dark (Nothingness, void, un-worlding, un-home). For this very reason, the goal of Parmenides' ecstatic journey to the goddess of truth, which is, at the same time, another Axial route that leads away from religion, is already revealed by his crossing of the "threshold" (οὐδός) between "the gates of the paths of Night and Day" (Fr. 1, 288, KRS, p. 242 f). The opposites, and therefore also the relation between them, are collapsed in the well-rounded truth (Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλῆος) of Being (ibid.). Religion was thereby transgressed, though the transformation was not completed once and for all, but rather bound to repeat itself time and again, as in Spinoza's 'substance', and later in the Self-assertion of man, of science, of language, of thought, and so on *ad infinitum*. Yet, a shadow remains. By giving this shadow a proper *name*, religion alone seems able to make *an object* of it. And there we have it: the name and the object at one go! Religion is a way of turning *Nothing* into essential *Being*. Religion fills in the Nothing.

And what is more: The worlds of the happy and the unhappy, the condition of angst and the clearing of being, come together in the way in which religion makes a home for itself in the world, a home of dual chambers in which it is, more than anything else, the relation between them which is worshipped and, therefore, manifested as a threshold that can be crossed only on certain conditions – at certain occasions – since each side are constituted by nothing but the threshold itself.

The man who eventually died while waiting for the gate to open in Kafka's *Before the Law* was perhaps tragically unaware that he himself was the unpassable threshold in a world where only a trick of light remains from a house and a Law that are not of this world.

## 7 Perspective (Thinking With and Against Religion)

*It has been found again.*

*What? – Eternity.*

*It is the sea, gone*

*With the sun.*

Jean Arthur Rimbaud

Epekeina tēs ousias, ‘*beyond being*’ ...

*Neither God nor humanity, but yet the world as that in which an outside can open itself,  
and become experience.*

Jean-Luc Nancy

The debate between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger, which I have mentioned in passing, seemed to end in an apparently irreconcilable difference of perspective: Either philosophy is concerned with the way in which human beings *structure the world* (transcendentalism) or it is concerned with the way in which being human is structured *by being-in-the-world* (phenomenology). In other words, either philosophy stares into a mirror of spontaneous world-projection (Cassirer), or it responds to its own fundamental receptivity and responsiveness (Heidegger). The reason why any solution to the discrepancy between these positions seems precluded is that both ways of thinking stand *within* the confines of their *outlook*. There is no independent argument for choosing the one over the other, though both Cassirer and Heidegger were eager to provide arguments for their own points of view. Against Cassirer’s claim that we humans can only conceive the world through our symbolic creativity, Heidegger remarked that it is the condition of our always already being-in-the-world that allows such representational activity in the first place. It is this *conditionality* which calls humans to think (*denken*) and which thus has to be be-thought (*bedenkt*). What it is to be human can only be appreciated *within* the temporal condition of mortality (our being-towards-death), that is, from the point of view of our finitude, not from the pretentious objectification owing to an explanatory theory. Agreeing in principle to the significance of human finitude, Cassirer countered the destitute view implicated in Heidegger’s notion of ‘world-fallenness’ (*Welt-verfallenheit*), arguing that the acknowledgement of finitude is exactly the human prerogative which procures a world-transcending symbolism unbeknownst to other creatures (cf. Gordon, 2010, 118). However, the philosopher’s game of being the one to ground the view of the other rarely leads anywhere. The heart of the matter might be that Cassirer (still) committed himself to live in a world of symbolic projections and, therefore, actually *lived in that world*. Heidegger committed himself to reflect on being as it was opened up by *Dasein*, that is, by finding himself already in the world, thrown into a being-towards-death, and thus this was the world in which *he lived*.

Peter E. Gordon, from whose invaluable overview of the Davos-debate I largely draw these points, leans slightly towards Cassirer's stand-point when speaking of what he wants to call "the cultural inscription of philosophy" (op.cit. 134). Gordon's aim is "to show how philosophy ramifies, how it is the carrier, perhaps even despite itself, of some broader cultural or historical significance" (ibid.). This is in line with the impression still radiating from the seminar, namely, that what was really at stake was a confrontation between two generations or even of two eras, an old and a new way of thinking. This does not in itself imply having a final say against either of the two positions (since both philosophers paid unremitting attention to the significance of changing times, either as appearing through ways of thinking, or through ways of being), but it may pose a question as to what point of departure a philosophy of religion should take. Should it begin from a philosophy of culture (and cultures) or from a reflection on the conditionality of being? Should it embrace the ever expanding 'human world' of self-created signs and images, or should it cut through all plurality in recognition of *the very possibility of being human*, the principal facticity of being a historical and cultural creature in the first place?

To my mind, perhaps philosophy is best served by not letting the one take an absolute precedence over the other. I should like to think that a kind of dialectics between a constructive view – in Cassirer's sense – and a destructive view – in Heidegger's specific sense might not only reflect two inevitable ways of human thinking and world-orientation, but might also say something important about religion, not least about philosophy's continuous relation with a religious tradition in a society which is no longer religious, or is at most post-secular.

I have in this book drawn my main inspiration from three philosophers especially prominent of the interwar period, namely, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Apart from my conviction that the profundity of their thinking deserves continuous attention, they might also represent 'a cultural inscription', which is no longer that of our contemporary world. There are probably un-thought implications in the relationship between the interwar period of the former century and our current globalized society tacitly inscribed in the way in which we (others) draw on their thinking today. The nature of this interrelation may be clearer to coming generations, but the basic ideas of their thinking still merits appropriation on current terms, not only with respect to religion as a general phenomenon, but also as way of keeping in touch with a time that is both gone and yet remains influential. Constructive as well as destructive energies in the human world-engagement were fomenting in this period, and one indeed senses a shared sensitivity of rising tides in the different, albeit affiliated, interest taken in religion by Cassirer, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Wittgenstein. Time has matured for recognizing the power and nature of these subterranean drives, which probably implies that we have outlived some of the particular vitalities. However, this should not make us any the less attentive to other forms and channels through which they may regain momentum. As elements of continuity, there is no denying that the presence of, and question about, religion is as energeti-

cally charged today as it was then. Moreover, the energies of religion and the energies of war are still channeled through one another. On the constructive side, searching for the meaning of life, as well as holding on to a securing order, are probably persistent elements of religion, though they may currently suffer from the quandary of being dispersed in a multicultural society with different congregational frameworks. Clearly, the globalization of today makes a difference. It opens up the world in new ways that presents human life – and thinking – with unaccustomed challenges.<sup>325</sup>

In the midst of these challenges, a still vibrant trace leads back to the confrontation between Cassirer and Heidegger, and more generally to a skepticism concerning the transcendental status reason had claimed for itself since Descartes and Kant. One of the branches stemming from this skepticism can be seen in the die-hard distinction between empirically based, denotative knowledge, on the one hand, and expressive, symbol/symbolic world-reception, on the other. Benjamin's and Cassirer's attempts to revise and expand the Kantian categories of knowledge were examples of this. More radically, however, Heidegger and Wittgenstein abandoned the 'categorical' form of thought altogether, exchanging it with *existential conditions* and *forms of life*, respectively. The uncompromising form of their thinking (including strains of Benjamin's thinking as well) meant that human expressions, in language, rather disclosed a being-in-the-world than a being-in-the-mind. Taking being-in-the-world to be another word for immanence, it means that also religion became a 'thing' of this world rather than a 'thing' of the mind (as it had been since Hume, Kant, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and most of all, Freud). Yet, the spirit of the distinction between 'empirical' and 'symbolic' world-engagement lingered on, and still does, recognizable in the discrepancy between theory and phenomenology, explanation and impression, constitutive truth-conditionality over and against 'meaning as use'. The interacting understanding of religion, attempted by the present book, takes place in this spirit as well. In fact, a continuous struggle to come to terms with the apparent split between fact and symbol haunts many current approaches.<sup>326</sup>

What happened when religion became a thing of this world in the interwar period (with uncanny results from which we have not yet healed) was, among other things, that its mental representation came to face an unexpected demystification. The thoughts of Benjamin, Heidegger and Wittgenstein have, each in their own way, *deconstructed* – pulled apart – the image of religion as a phenomenon of human consciousness (though only Heidegger used the term '*Destruktion*' in this sense). As a thing of this world, religion survives by taking new shapes, according to the way

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325 As Nancy asks: "How can enthusiasm be saved from the death of God? This is a serious question", 2013, 78.

326 Habermas, who has voiced a frustration by the unthinking dualism between naturalism and religious dogmatism (2005, 7 f) is one of those who strive to overcome it, and Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Benjamin are perspicuously present among the influences he draws on in this respect.

in which we name it as well as to emotional undercurrents the result of which may always only be realized in the aftermath of their ebbing out. One of the current philosophers who have paid a close attention to the way in which a changed face of religion (re-)appears in today's world is Jean-Luc Nancy.

Drawing primarily on Heidegger and Derrida, Nancy regards Christianity as a tradition which from the moment of its own birth – of God in man – initiated the process of its own deconstruction. Demanding “to open in this world an alterity or an unconditional alienation” (2008, 10), Christianity raised a scorpion's tail behind its own back, as it were. Inasmuch as the divine truth was an alienating truth *in and of this world*, it was destined to alienate itself. More importantly, however, Christianity seems to have survived its self-inflicted sting, as it were, by opening up in the midst of its own ‘ruins’ (to borrow a Benjaminean term) a ‘dis-enclosure’ of metaphysics. Thus, the original “opening of the world to inaccessible alterity” (ibid.), by which the world grew alien to itself, returns as a re-opening of this closure (*clôture*). Bearing witness to *alogon*, ‘that which cannot be spoken’ (following steadfast in the trace of logos), it finds its prominent formulation in Wittgenstein's Tractarian dictum about the sense of the world which “must be found outside of the world” (op.cit. 5).

Reflecting, yet also transposing, the aforementioned distinction between the ‘empirical’ and the ‘symbolic’,<sup>327</sup> Nancy takes pain to place himself beyond the false alternative between “the wizening humanism” (*dessèchement humaniste*) and “the correlative temptations of a spiritualizing deluge” (ibid.). Speaking from a point of view, where ‘sense’ and ‘consciousness’ have lost their philosophical prerogatives, he claims that

Philosophy (and science with it) has managed somehow to intimidate itself with its proclaimed exclusions of a religion from which it never ceased, underhandedly, to draw nourishment, though without really questioning itself about this ‘secularization’ and – we must return to this – about this consequent ‘laïcization’ or social generalization of secularity (ibid.).

Implicit in Nancy's critical gaze (reminiscent here of Nietzsche) on a philosophical and scientific tradition, which has turned the blind eye to its own affiliation with religion, we can detect the diagnosis of enlightened reason's presumptuousness owing to its unrecognized character as worldview, that is, as being a way, I would say, of mastering a world-habitation. The ‘social generalization of secularity’ which is not merely diagnosed – but also incited – by the naturalization of religion (not least in the proclamation of ‘neutrality’ in the comparative study of religion) is involved in this attempt to control the world, as it were. Giorgio Agamben has paid attention to the ramifications of this objectification in his *Homo Sacer*-project, picking up the thread

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<sup>327</sup> The term ‘symbol’ may be ill chosen to mediate, or span over, the difference between a neo-Kantian and a phenomenological view of immediate world-interaction, but is used here in a very broad sense of ‘bringing mind and world together in a non-signifying expression’.



from Foucault's genealogical re-description of Christianity, but this is not the route Nancy takes. What occupies Nancy is not so much how Christianity has enacted its power over the human subject as, for instance, by installing a will to truth which led from a faith in God to a faith in nature. His attention is focused on the metaphysical gesture by which Christianity and philosophy, being two sides of the same coin, once turned being (*être*) into beings (*étant*), whose presence was established only in – and by – complete alterity. Differently put, beings were stabilized by “enclosing them in their own beingness (*étanité*)” (op.cit. 6), installing a dual register of being, divided between ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’, the ‘here-below’ and the ‘beyond’, the ‘sensuous’ and ‘the intelligible’, ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’. However, the self-referential character of this closure manifested, at the same time, its own instability (a Foucauldian thought indeed). Thus, in modernity a dis-enclosure took form, involving philosophy as well as Christianity in a new opening of being. Apart from the acknowledged line of thinking ensuing from Deleuze and Derrida, Nancy follows Heidegger in paying attention to ‘the event of Being’ by way of asking in what way Christianity continues to occupy us, and he locates this interest in the exact space left by its metaphysical self-dissolution.<sup>328</sup> Thus, the relationship, if not dialectics, between condition and culture, historicity and history, is deeply inscribed in Nancy's thinking. According to this perspective, Heidegger's attempt to show how the openness of Being lets the human *Dasein* stand out (appearing within its own view, as it were), is exchanged by Nancy with the existence of everything, ‘the sense of the world’ (*le sens du monde*), appearing as well as disappearing in the guise of culture (even if this culture is, first and foremost, recognizable through a formation of the subject of being). Nancy's concept of culture, however, is not a concept of spontaneous world-projecting, but a dispended culture of suspended sense (or the very sense of exposition). It is a worldview caught in the dilemma of not being able to take leave of itself while, at the same time, having passed beyond its own dogmatic claims. In other words, it continues to make us wonder whether it responds *in thought* to something other than its own making.

Heidegger formulated a similar dilemma, directed against Cassirer's view of the structuring power of the human mind which, according to Heidegger, remained blind to its own preconditions. The question, for Heidegger, was how philosophical thought were to gain access to these preconditions. For the sake of argument, he asks along with Cassirer whether ‘a determinate worldview’ is not taken as a basis for the possibility of ‘a metaphysics of *Dasein*’? (cf. Gordon, op.cit. 180). Then, he retorts that:

I would misunderstand myself if I said that I gave philosophy free points of view. And here a problem is expressed: that of the relationship between philosophy and worldview. Philosophy

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<sup>328</sup> Nancy's concept of ‘déclosion’ may also bear more than just a superficial resemblance to Heidegger's ‘Erschliessung’/‘Erschlossenheit’.

does not have the task of giving worldview, although, again, worldview is the presupposition of philosophizing. (cited from Gordon, *ibid.*)

What Heidegger claimed in 1929 was that philosophy might be able to respond to its own implication in a given worldview in such a way as to show the ‘transcendence’, that is, ‘the inner possibility’, of *Dasein* (*ibid.*). In Nancy, this transcendence is turned into a mere ‘transcending’, the flickering moment of a sense, or a God, which passes us by (or rather a God *which is this passing-us-by*) (op.cit. 120). In other words, he follows through with Derrida’s notion of deconstruction (which is, at least in Nancy’s reception, much more than a strategic way of arresting the unsaid, the *alogon*), having the thought of faith leaving no ground of being behind, yet at the same time passing over the unground (*Abgrund, Nichtigkeit*), being constantly on the move, as it were. In this flight of sense, which is, at the same time, an expectation of, or rather a hope for, the fulfilment of the suspended sense in its totality, Nancy seems able to capture the duality of construction and deconstruction, or perhaps more precisely: the comings and goings of sense, according to the eternal quest for meaning.

The grand Nietzschean narrative which clearly informs Nancy’s deconstructive thinking is that the histories – and fates – of Christianity and philosophy are bound together by the loss of sense (in both senses of the word), that is, by nihilism (op.cit. 147): “Christianity’s fate is perhaps the fate of sense in general” (op.cit. 142), and “[w]hat must be set in motion can only be effected by way of a mutual dis-enclosure of the dual heritages of religion and philosophy” (op.cit. 6).

Inasmuch as human beings are creatures of sense and, at it seems, invariably in search for meaning, we cannot but seek a ‘cure’ for the present day ‘ills’ (op.cit. 34). Yet, the metaphysical possibility (in the traditional ‘sense’) of regaining and securing sense remains closed to us, left behind, as it were. For this reason, Christianity does no longer speak to us on account of being a religion. Rather, “it is a matter of grasping how we are already outside of the religious”, as Nancy says (*ibid.*).<sup>329</sup> Being Christians ‘outside of the religious’ means, on the one hand, that the content of faith has, in some ‘sense’, become nonsensical, and yet in another ‘sense, that it might open up again, or even open up the world that has been enclosed upon itself. First of all, however, “the name *god*” has been rendered absolutely problematic, or non-signifying; all power of assurance has withdrawn from it (op.cit. 36) and it has been converted into the humanist dream, that is, the belief in “the democratic ethic of the rights of man and of solidarity” (op.cit. 37). Inasmuch as this dream, however, has come to suffer the same loss of credibility as that of spiritualism or dogmatism, the task can no longer be found, Nancy claims, in leading:

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<sup>329</sup> I should not want to take this in the sense of dialectical theology (and neither would Nancy), which remains committed in faith to a dogmatically defined alterity.

towards the fulfilment of a new divine realm, neither in this world nor in another. Nor is it to rediscover the unity proper and immanent to a world of the myth that has decomposed in the Westernization-monotheization of the world. Instead, it is to think a 'sense-of-world' or a 'world-sense' (*sens-de-monde*) in a world divided in its own being-world. (op.cit. 39)

What we can and must hope for, Nancy holds, is that "a totality of possible sense" is still thinkable (ibid.). Christianity is the eschatological proclamation of this 'thinkability', which entails that the suspension of sense is anything but the preclusion of meaning; rather, "it is sense as tension or direction toward the advent of sense as content" (op.cit. 147). Related to this overall perspective, Nancy takes a certain interest in the way in which the Catholic philosopher Gérard Granel has spoken about a 'God-world' as opposed to the 'gods of the philosophers' (op.cit. 72). "The divine", in Granel, "is always a way of naming in regard to the world, the constitutive alterity of its opening" (ibid.). As phrased by Nancy: "Divine is the division that creates the world". Granel extracts 'the light of day' from the Latin name of the divine, *dies*, associated with a "mother for Sky and Earth", a division according to which, Nancy adds, "it is possible to have the order of things" (ibid.). Thus, the meaning of the 'divine' also includes the "separation between day (*dies*, *divus*) and night", as Nancy puts it (2013, 46). Light presupposes darkness, as being presupposes non-being. Hence, the consuming darkness of night, reflecting the Nothingness of Being, houses a spatio-temporal double of vanishing light. As a transcendent abode of decomposing as well as fertile powers, associated with the ancient twins of sleep and death, it names another aspect of the world, kept safe by myth, yet opened towards significant nonsense on the outside of religion. Thus, in the opening chapter of *The Sense of the World*, Nancy doesn't hesitate to proclaim that

There is no longer any world: no longer a mundus, a cosmos, a composed and complete order (from) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation. Or, again, there is no longer the 'down here' of a world one could pass through toward a beyond of outside of this world (1997, 4).

Yet, although the mythical 'beyond' has withdrawn from the world, it has nonetheless left the mark of a transcending relation, an opening of something other than the world in the world itself. The question therefore remains: "How do we touch, or let ourselves be touched by, the opening of the world/to the world?" (2008, 73). Picking up on this issue in the second volume of his *Deconstruction of Christianity*, he points to 'adoration' as a greeting or salutation (*salut*), which "is neither a saving (*sauvetage*) nor a salvation (*salut*)", since it is not "sheltered outside the world and beyond the reach of death" (2013, 53).<sup>330</sup> Rather, it is an adoration addressed to the opening of an outside

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<sup>330</sup> In stating that "the whole world can make sense, from 'salut!'", and by asking, rhetorically: "Do not the morning sun, the plant pushing out of the soil, address a 'salut!' to us?", Nancy's concept of 'greeting' as existence making sense and *being* sense (2013, 18) comes very close to Benjamin's inter-

in the midst of the world, and thus it consists “in holding onto the *nothing/nothingness* – without reason or origin – of the opening.” (op.cit. 15). It is the very fact of this ‘holding on’ that occupies Nancy, resonating of the ‘Halt’ in Heidegger. This halt, which is a halt only in and of being (despite its holding on to nothing), is another way of saying that the objectifying as well as the subjectifying possibility has withdrawn, leaving the open question of Being in its trail. ‘God’ has moved out of this Being, departing from the object as well as from the subject and confronts us, therefore, with the inescapable condition of atheism. In this scenario, faith remains as a gesture which has the courage to say and embrace “the strange”, which, in Nancy’s view, is nothing but “a divine body discerning” (ibid.).<sup>331</sup> The divine appears as the strangeness of the world, the uncanniness lurking behind the ordinary. To make oneself a home in, and in making a home of, this unhomey being-in-the-world, is what religion is about (and therefore such ‘dwelling’ – as ‘the elements of an orientation’ – has been lost ‘outside of the religious’). The divine body is discerned in the ambiguity of being, pointing towards light as well as darkness, the Janus-faces of both time and space. What unites myth and religion, in this respect, is the act of endowing the division of abodes (the earthly home in light of the divine realm and *vice versa*) with the power of the proper name. Nancy seems to be in line with this perspective, at least in respect of religious faith, insofar as he thinks that “[m]ere faith in the uniqueness of God [...] is not, by itself alone, truly faith. Faith, in order to be, that is, in order to act, draws its consistency from somewhere else: from a proper name” (op.cit. 56).<sup>332</sup> The proper name differs from the predicate, as Benjamin has shown, by being irreplaceable and irreducible. It doesn’t re-present anything, but *is rather* the presence of the ‘thing’ (*ousia*) itself, as of the person it names and expresses. Thus, the proper name according to Nancy “does not turn into concept” (op.cit. 56). The name of God is exactly that which in faith resists a reduction of theology to cosmology and rationality.<sup>333</sup> God’s

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pretation of the familiar gaze of ‘correspondences’ in Baudelaire as well as his early notion that “die Dinge [gehen] auf den Menschen zu, sie ‘stossen’ gegen ihn, sie gehen ihm entgegen, sie sagen sich ihm, so zu sagen, um von ihm gesagt werden”, in Gabrielli’s rendering, 2004, 239. To put it differently, both Benjamin and Nancy subscribes to a form of ‘redemptive immanence’.

**331** In his second volume, he even speaks of the world as “strangeness itself, absolute strangeness: the strangeness of the real”, 2013, 33. Thus, the vacated place left by the divine subject has been replaced, not by humanity as a substituting sovereign, but by ‘numerous ones’, as Nancy says, while referring to Jorge Luis Borges writing that “My name is someone and no one... I have borne witness to the world: I have confessed the strangeness of the world” (Nancy, 1997, 68). In other words, the strange world, as well as the stranger, appears as pure existence without ground or identifiable subjectivity. Yet, even this existence appears on the ground of distinction – exactly as ex-istence.

**332** Later, Nancy follows up on this thought by stating that “‘God’ could be the name that, as a proper noun [*nom*], names the unnamable and, as a common noun, designates the division dies/nox, day and night, opening the rhythm of the world”, 2013, 78.

**333** There seems to be a slight deviation, however, between this view and his notion of ‘God’ as a common noun that designates distinction (in the world) as such.

proper name is not even an “introduction to a logic of the mysteries of incarnation and redemption” (ibid.). If anything, it “serves to identify Christ”, the other name through which the Supreme Being is appropriated *in and by the world*. Speaking of this appropriation as identifying Christ with the Messiah (ibid.), Nancy couples the presence of “the messianic quality”, dispensed in suspension of the *parousia*, with the suspended presence of sense. The heart of the Christian doctrine, according to Nancy, is “that of *homousia*, consubstantiality, the identity or community of being and substance between the Father and the Son” (op.cit. 151). Setting out from the Greek *ousia* (feminine present participle of εἶναι (*to be*), synonymous with *substance*), Christianity could only conceive of it as the divinely incorporated form of pure being, casting its light upon the world in “infinite remove” (thus fatally losing the sense of the light of day which it denoted for the Pre-Christian antiquity, cf. Granel, 1999, 540; Theunissen, 2008, 161 ff). Forming and inhabiting the world by way of its own removal, “the *parousia* of the *homousia*, far from representing a difference in nature between theology and philosophy, in fact represents the infinite opening of the sense of *ousia* thought of as presence, a *parousia* of itself” (ibid.). The deconstructions of theology and philosophy coincide in a Messianic hope for the return of being, in the fulfilment and totality of sense.

Although Nancy speaks from a Catholic background, the implication of a Messianic faith in the restoration of a ‘sense-world’ cannot but bring Benjamin’s Messianic concept of ‘now-time’, *Jetztzeit*, to mind. A historical line of thought, involving the continuity of cultural criticism, can be drawn from the concept of a redemptive power of undisturbed ‘correspondences’ to the concept of the coming of world-sense. Yet, the cultural criticism in Nancy’s philosophical theology, if that is a proper name for his thinking, is not directed against the injustice of history but against the unthinking dogmatism of theology as well as of humanism. Benjamin thought of a counterfactual opening of history through the ability of art (and religion) to remember the victims of the past, whereas Nancy diagnoses the modern *conditions* of faith in a current opening of the world. Various differences according to background and other personal proclivities aside, Benjamin and Nancy might be said to represent, each in their own time, a certain sensibility towards a vibrant, yet undercurrent need for redemption.

The gloomy sense of a declining world that haunted the times from Romanticism until the World Wars of the former Century may even bear some similarity to future expectations in today’s world with their own share of anxiety (according to an economic dystopia, overconsumption, overpopulation, and religious fanaticism). This doesn’t prevent contemporary thinking from harboring prospects of new beginnings (reminiscent of the redemptive aspects Benjamin’s and Heidegger’s thinking, their incompatibility notwithstanding). Relieved from the burden of strong ontologies (if that is indeed a release?), much of contemporary philosophy seems to find a renewed interest in religion, theology, and faith. Derrida, Pareyson, Vattimo, Marion, Agamben, and Nancy have all been concerned with faith as a continuing gesture reflecting the often repeated point that the decline of religion has not silenced man’s cry for salva-

tion. Rather than investing hope in the exhausted promise of a metaphysical truth, however, the general currents of philosophy have, since Marx's 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach, been concerned with praxis, that is, with immanence and social reality. "Das Tun ist alles", as Nietzsche, the prophet of modernity, once proclaimed (W II, 790). Faith thus returns as act, and *as act* it "actualizes the sense", as Nancy puts it (op.cit. 153). If faith, moreover, "consists in entrusting oneself to the word of God" (ibid.), it carries the significant connotation of relating actively (or in action) to a *named* one, rather than to the inactivating 'uniqueness' of God as such (op.cit. 56).<sup>334</sup> In this sense, Nancy shows traces of his Catholic background and places himself loosely in line with Pascal, for whom the name carried a weight that no intellectual thought could substitute, let alone fathom. The indispensable significance of a named God, however, seems to survive only through the loss of metaphysical implications clinging to a *personal* God. When Nancy, much in line with Vattimo, speaks of faith's "adhesion to itself" (op.cit. 152), as the faithfulness of faith itself (cf. op.cit. 154), it takes its cue from the analogous experience of love, that is, from relating – in trust and faithfulness – to a loved one (op.cit. 153). Thus, the personal dimension in faith (as in prayer) is implicitly irremissible, yet absent of anything but the fleeting moment of 'a divine wink', the momentary sense of sense in passing (op.cit. 108).<sup>335</sup> Just as the aim of faith is "without a correlative object" and therefore "has no fulfilment of sense but that of the aim itself" (op.cit. 152), and as adoration is nothing but "a fulfilling of its impetus, its movement, its desire" (2013, 85), so prayer "does not supplicate to obtain – and hence is, in Adorno's words, 'freed from the magic of the result'" (208, 137).<sup>336</sup> Yet, one may wonder if this is only a 'truth' of *our* culture. "The representation of a wish", Wittgenstein once wrote in his remarks on Frazer, "is, *eo ipso*, the representation [*Darstellung*] of its realization [*Erfüllung*]." (PO, 125). Magic may or may not aim at a result outside of itself. More than anything else, Wittgenstein continues, it "brings a wish to representation; it represents a wish" (125). Perhaps, the immediate relations of meaning that run through magic and myth, and which may be 'sensed' as re-forming themselves in a contemporary way of thinking sense without sense, have always been present in religion, religion being a more far-ranging phenomenon, of

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<sup>334</sup> Also "Faith consists in relating to God and to the name of God", op.cit. 152,

<sup>335</sup> Commenting on Heidegger's concept of the wink (especially in GA 65, III, § 255), Nancy writes: "The privilege of Wink consists, in short, in the fact that its sense is spent in the passage immediately stolen away, in the hint suddenly hidden of a sense that vanishes, and whose truth consists in vanishing", op.cit. 108.

<sup>336</sup> Commenting on the poetry by Michel Deguy, Nancy refers to the following quote by Adorno: "*Prayer demythologized*, freed from the magical result, represents the human attempt, *however vain*, to utter the Name itself instead of communicating meanings", op.cit. 129. Nancy adds that: "Signification subdues the thing to its genitive: it gives the sense *of* the thing. Nomination presents the thing", op.cit. 131. This is as close as Nancy explicitly comes to a view comparable to Benjamin's thoughts about *name* and *naming* (in religion and art).

course, than the metaphysical wedding between Christianity and philosophy. Thus, we may here reach a point of contact between cultural diversity and a basic human conditionality: Making oneself a home in the world by way of naming. All the difference, however, not to say *a world of difference*, lies in the way in which this is done. Science and religion are such different ways, as are our ongoing attempts to appropriate the tradition which has formed us as the historical subjects we are.

Hence, Nancy speaks of history as a continuous ‘distortion’ as well as ‘opening’ (with retention and protention), that is:

history as the opening of the subject as such – who is only a subject by being a historical subject, in distention with itself – is the matricial element that Christianity brings progressively to light as its truth, because it does not in fact come to pass all at once, *ex abrupto* (op.cit. 146).

Nancy seems here to be somewhat in line with Foucault’s late studies of the Greco-Christian origin of the hermeneutics of the Self, emerging from the divinely informed self-relation. Yet, instead of taking his cue from Foucault’s reference to a ‘care of the self’ (that is, the Platonic *epimeleia heautou* taken up in a confessional sense by monasticism), Nancy refers to the traditional Catholic view of sin as atonable misdeeds in light of our human *conditionality*, that is, the ‘generative condition’ of wanting to be the gods that we are not (op.cit. 155). With this temptation culturally inscribed in the myth of the Garden of Eden, one cannot but notice how deeply Nancy commits his thinking, and the Heideggerean notions engraved in it,<sup>337</sup> to this exact tradition. Foucault, on the other hand, exchanges the ontic conditionality of Heidegger’s ‘Care’ (Sorge), the existential structure of *Dasein*, with a historically contingent ‘care of the self’. It is required that we let both views play a role in our assessment not only of Christianity but also of the way in which we pose questions as Christians. That Christianity is bound to play a privileged role follows at least from the fact that it has formed our general frame of thinking.

This brings us to the question of truth and the ambiguity it entails. Christianity is from the very beginning, so Nancy avers, a “state of self-surpassing”, which therefore, one might add, reflects the true image of God in man. Owing to their *communicatio idiomatum* (exchange of properties) both have to suffer same fate of self-transgression, as Foucault has pointed out (1999, 85 f). Consequently, “Christianity *as such*, is surpassed, because it is itself, and by itself, in a state of being surpassed” (op.cit. 141).<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> When Nancy holds sin to be “an indebtedness of existence as such” (op.cit. 156), it resonates with the ontological ‘ethics’ of Heidegger (though in a sense that certainly departs from the traditional understanding of ethics).

<sup>338</sup> It does not mean – Nancy assures us – that Christianity is not alive: “Doubtless it is still alive and will be for a long time, but at bottom, if it is alive, it has ceased giving life – at least as the organizing structure of an experience that would be something other than a fragmented individual experience” (op.cit. 142). I am inclined to agree with this diagnosis.



Regarded (with Nietzsche) as an ascetic will to truth, Christianity undergoes a fall from metaphysics which brings down with it a certain dominion of truth. If we agree with Nancy that the positivity, the givenness, of sense shares a fate with the God of unquestionable truth, i.e., the authority of a supreme subject (as announced already by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida), it seems that there remains nothing to hold on to apart from faith itself. Nancy readily admits that the opening, created by 'a living God', is naught but a step taken in passing (or the in-passing *as such* which is what the 'living God' is – or has become), exposing "itself as life of the appropriation/disappropriation extending beyond itself" (op.cit. 156). This double aspect (of keeping and leaving behind), which Nancy captures in his concept of *dis-enclosure* (in which I cannot but sense an ambiguity, or indecision, as regards the explicatory levels of *structure* and *action*), brings the closure of ambiguity, as it were, into the open itself. "The Open (or 'the free', as Hölderlin also called it) is essentially ambiguous (It is the entire self-destructive or self-deconstructive ambiguity of Christianity)" (op.cit. 157).<sup>339</sup> Consequently, Nancy has to ask: "What is an opening that would not sink into its own openness? What is an infinite sense that nonetheless makes sense, an empty truth that yet has the weight of truth?" (ibid.). If there is an answer, it might be given beyond – or prior to – the madness of Nietzsche and Hölderlin, it may lie, according to Nancy, in the existential acceptance of immanence and temporality, that is, the emergence and disappearance of sense, in the blink of an eye, suggesting – and suspending – the messianic possibility of a totality of world-sense.

Instead of embracing this version of Heidegger's 'waiting for a coming god', who is the only one that 'can save us',<sup>340</sup> I shall merely stick to the point about the crisis of sense implicating the concept of truth.<sup>341</sup> If this crisis reveals a crack in the very

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**339** Thus, the madness of Hölderlin's permanent step into the open (cf. above, 6.4) can be paralleled with Nietzsche's surrender to madness owing to the impossible attempt to exchange a will to truth with a will to illusion, cf. Heidegger, 1961, I 233.

**340** Nancy thus rephrases Heidegger's utterance to imply a Messianic 'divinity' which, instead of saving us (with all the traditional implications of salvation, '*salut*'), may pass us by while saluting us so that we may learn "to salute one another", 2013, 84.

**341** Nancy remarks that the loss of sense doesn't entail the abandonment of truth, but merely means a shift of its registers, 1997, 12. In line with Heidegger, he thus defines truth as being "the quality of the presentation of being-*such* as *such*" (i.e., its *haecceity* in terms of Duns Scotus) and regards sense as "being *coming* into presence" (ibid.). The loss of sense is, in other words, caused by the irruption of this flow, the movement of meaning as being-toward (*l'être-à*). The being-such (*l'être-tel*) as well as the being-toward, that is, truth and sense, are both blocked by metaphysics as the atemporal generalization of being. In order for truth and sense to regain 'meaning', the blockage has to be lifted. 'Dis-enclosure' and 'adoration' are Nancy's terms for this lifting (constituting a parallel to Heidegger's *Erschleissung*, *Lichtung*, *Wink*). Yet, at the same time, Nancy states that "Truth revealed is truth that contains no doctrine or preaching. It is not the truth of any adequation or *unveiling*" (2013, 41, my italics). With the latter remark it is as if Nancy actually finds 'too much sense' in Heidegger's ontological view. Hence, he continues, in a more deconstructive vein, by calling revealed truth "the infinite truth

division between being and beings, it does not only concern being in its supreme, self-enclosed, sense but also undermines the ground of *beings*, inflicting the closure of empirical world-reduction. The name for this dispelling of truth is skepticism, and one of the consequences, taken by Wittgenstein and Rorty with slightly different implications (cf. above 4.5), is to return 'truth' to a place between various other contextual functions of language. In religion this function is, before anything else, the name, or rather the name of the name.

The unnamable origin of the name, the coming to be of language, referred to by Benjamin as 'revelation' or 'the word of God' as non-theoretical conceptions of that which cannot be grasped conceptually but only received, is mirrored by Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological concept of the given, of which he writes that: "As nothing precedes it that could account for it, nothing can recall its beginning, it thus gives itself without recall, irrevocably" (2002, 174). The implicated event, Marion has in mind in this respect, is not language, though, but rather a gift which indicates the self-appropriating event of which Heidegger speaks (in terms of *Ereignis*, cf. GA, 65). In speaking about "the call and responsal articulated as that which gives itself and what shows itself" (2002, 296), Marion acknowledges the (other philosophical) call to ask: "who or what summons, invokes, and surprises the gifted?" (ibid.). The question, of course, reflects the suspicion concerning whether this phenomenological level does not, in fact, cover up 'the caller' or 'the giver', whether it might not be God, the Other, Being, or life itself, if not, alternatively, the empirically 'given' that calls us? How can the phenomenological view defend its taking halt at 'the givenness', 'the giveable', 'the gift', or, to put it differently: how can it acknowledge only the kind of being which gives itself in such a way that we may, in response, receive ourselves as 'being given'? Yet, against this double suspicion (concerning the authority of 'the other' and 'the empirical'), Marion holds that the implicated 'giver' must "remain phenomenologically anonymous in such a way that, secondly, the gifted responds to it in accordance with a reduction to the pure immanence of givenness" (op.cit. 297). Marion claims that the call-and-responsal according to which "the saturated phenomenon", the paradox of the gift, is being given, cannot not come with a name. "One cannot", the argument goes, "starting from a call, go back directly to this or that type of paradox, still less to identifying its name". In other words, the call bears no name because it would then "assume them all" (ibid.). Thus, "[i]f it is ever necessary to give a name to the call, this will not be the job of the call itself (nor of the giver), but of the responsal (or the givee)" (op.cit. 298). Even in the case of the father who names his son by his own (identifying) surname, we may from a phenomenological point of view see it as merely exemplifying the anonymity of the call. By way of the reciprocal givenness of father and son, the father will "be born onto his own paternity" only "to the

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of the suspension of sense: an interruption, for sense cannot be completed, and an overflowing, for it does not cease", ibid.

extent that he responds to the child's anonymous call" (op.cit. 301). In other words, "the phenomenologically legitimate gift is deployed according to an immanent and intrinsic givenness that owes nothing to the giver, not even its identity" (op.cit. 297). The call is that which calls the responsal, but never itself (op.cit. 298). By taking this phenomenological stance, Marion advocates for pure conditionality.<sup>342</sup> As a consequence, however, he turns a blind eye to the historical and cultural dimension, which is present in Benjamin as well as Nancy.<sup>343</sup> Marion claims that

the highest name of God, such as he reveals it to Moses, attests precisely the impertinence of every essential name or description by summing it up in an empty tautology – I am who I am – which opens the field to the endless litany of all names. The voice that reveals reveals precisely because it remains voiceless, more exactly nameless, but *in* the Name. (op.cit. 297)

However, the name, rooted in pure language as the word of God, does not serve the function of a description. The 'I am who I am' would describe an empty tautology only if it was regarded as a *predication*.<sup>344</sup> Yet, the name God, which is the religious *premise* of truth rather than the predicated truth *of* being, is one of the historically indispensable elements of what is invariably regarded as religion. It may, furthermore, point to a conditional dimension. "The very idea of the name", that is, the divine name of all names, "defines the farthest reaches in which 'letting be' operates in truth", as Nancy writes (op.cit. 135), and further, in apparent contrast to Marion: "[T]he 'true' addressee of adoration is the real, whose presence is not to be confused with the given present; it is the real whose presence gives or presents itself when it is 'addressed'" (op.cit. 136), that is, named. Contrary to the nature of the category, the name does not sum up anything; it inhabits the world as it is itself inhabited by the world.<sup>345</sup> I (want to) read part of Nancy's description of (the deconstructive paradox of) Christianity as pointing in this direction, which means that it opens our eyes to more than (just) Christianity. Instead of understanding revelation in phenomenological terms as the event of voiceless revealing, I think that we should, in line with thinkers as different

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**342** Like Nancy, Marion is concerned with conceiving the passing moment of an event (joined in call and responsal). In his notion of the wink of an eye, Nancy can also speak of the "gift without a giver, this gift that in itself is simply equal to the event of the world", 2013, 14.

**343** See for instance Nancy, op.cit. 141.

**344** As Nancy writes: "The god is therefore not the designated but only the designating" (op.cit. 114) and very poignantly that "[o]nly when reduced to the principle of supreme being does 'god' have a sense: but then he no longer needs his name, and this is what is announced by saying, proclaiming, and shouting that 'God is dead'. But the name God does not die with that supreme being. And that should perhaps make us decide to consider it a proper name" (op.cit. 115).

**345** Thus, the 'event' (*évenir*), in Nancy's view, "opens *within* the world an *outside* that is not a beyond-the-world, but the *truth* of the world", op.cit. 79. I see no indication that Marion would agree to this.

Benjamin and Nancy, hold fast to the indispensable importance of name and world-revelation as disclosing the nature of human existence in-the-world.

But what does the name reveal? Does it merely reveal the dependency of the Other? Is it nothing but a nearly (or best) forgotten, perhaps even immature, dimension of human imagination, its creative response to being, which thrived to the full only within a mythical way of thinking? Or does it also have its root in an indispensable relation between human conditionality and historical transmission? What does the name reveal? According to Benjamin and Wittgenstein it reveals the innermost nature of language, a nature which is, however, only a second nature of use, an opening of the world which is nothing but the opening act itself, adored and remembered through the name.<sup>346</sup> So what does the name reveal? It reveals nothing, or rather: it reveals *the* 'Nothing'! Speaking in terms of myth and religion, it means the totality of sense, a radical *coincidentia oppositorum*, in which everything is darkness or blinding light. Yet, out of this darkness a residence of chthonic powers – a realm of the departed – takes form, contrasting the light of day on the surface of the earth where the living dwell. In Nancy's words:

Christian revelation is that, in the end, nothing is *revealed*, nothing but the end of revelation itself, or else that revelation is to say that sense is unveiled purely as sense, in person, but in a person such that all the sense of that person consists in revealing himself (op.cit. 147).

This is how modernity sounds, according to Nancy. We live in a world in which we have religion without religion – as we also inhabit the world without inhabiting it (1997, 4). We are speaking from the dis-enclosed 'confines' of subjectivity; a subjectivity that reflects and is reflected in God, but a God who only speaks to us in passing, at the exact point where the conditionality of *Dasein* is recognized, even if only for a moment, in words of revelation.<sup>347</sup> The 'being-toward' (*l'être-à*) of sense is, therefore, at the same time the stretching movement of subjectivity as a pure *being-toward-death* (1997, 61; 66); a being that faces *nothing*.

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**346** Let us therefore recall Borges' words: "My name is someone and no one...". The modern, secularized opening, bears the name of anonymity, the name for no one in particular and yet always *some* one, testifying to the strangeness of a disenchanted world.

**347** Thus, contrasting Marion's view, Nancy sums up, rather elegantly, the relation between 'name' and 'world-opening', while at the same time pinpointing what it is that religious language does not (and *cannot*) say about itself: "*god* is the common name of the separation between light and darkness, seeing and not seeing, day and night, something and nothing, without that – namely, that separation, that step – being properly named. *God* names, rather – in all languages, according to their various resources – the opening of the name to its own non-sense, yet also that very opening as a calling out", op.cit. 118.

Yet, that nothing is, in the end, revealed is that which, in its own sense, characterizes the world-inhabiting gesture of religion.<sup>348</sup> Nothing turns into everything. That ‘nothing is ever lost’, as Robert Bellah has put it, means in religion that everything which comes to pass passes over into the in-discernable realm of the divine. So ‘the divine’ is not only ‘a body discerning’, as Nancy has it, but also a body un-discerning, the invisibility as the gist of that which eludes, yet also impregnates the visible with meaning, that which falls out of the empirical gaze of the world. Nancy likens it to an ‘overflowing’, a fulfilment of sense which, in the movement of transgressing, remains where it is, as “water completely filling up a cup forms a slight bulge, a thin convergent meniscus that rises higher than the edges of the glass. The filling up trembles, it is fragile” (2013, 86). Moreover, by using this image as an interpretation of the ineffable in *Tractatus*, Nancy says of “this fragility” that it “is that of the sense of the world [that] must lie outside the world” (2013, 86; cf. 2008, 5).<sup>349</sup> We have to ask, however, if this imperceptible (transcendent yet immanent) ‘outside’ is anything but the invisibility of pure being? And is this invisibility of pure being anything but the active force behind the metaphysical exhaustion, or deconstruction, of meaning?<sup>350</sup> As Heidegger would say: modernity is held in the spell of a forgetfulness of being, from which only a God can save us!<sup>351</sup> I would rather say that science as well as philosophy *and religion* are different ways of coming to grips with a world-habitation that can never be ful-

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**348** Take, for instance, the mysteries of Eleusis, where the secret (*mystērion*) was known by all initiated and therefore ‘empty’ or no secret at all. Only the taboo, not the content, made it a ‘secret’. Or think of the ultimate state of meditation, the third *āyatana*, which the yogins call ‘Nothingness’, an “absence, which is, paradoxically, a plenitude”, Armstrong, 2000, 55.

**349** In another context, however, Nancy distances himself from the way in which he takes Wittgenstein to conceive of a ‘sense of the world’ beyond the world of facts (in *Tractatus*), since he wants to emphasize instead, with Spinoza, that ‘the sense of the world’ has “its outside on the inside”, 1997, 54. Thus, as Nancy points out, the formula *deus sive natura* didn’t offer two names for one thing, but rather announced that which intra-mundanelly reaches beyond the world (*ibid.*). That being said, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* may more than likely be viewed as a similar ‘exposition’ of Spinoza’s thought.

**350** As Nancy says of ‘relation’, i.e., the relation, for instance, of the ‘greeting’ (*salut*): “[T]here is relation, there is only that [...] an infinite relation that does not relate anything – no senses caught in a net – and that opens everything and everyone. An infinite relation that only finitude knows”, 2013, 87.

**351** Commenting on this exclamation, Nancy writes: “Undoubtedly, we must understand instead the divinity of this ‘god’ on the one hand, and, on the other, no longer speak of ‘salvation’ (saving, Rettung), but learn how to salute, to salute one another” (2013, 84), which resonates, vibrantly, of Benjamin’s redemptive ‘correspondences’. Thus, speaking about the ‘things’ of God’s created world Benjamin says that they “can communicate to one another” through a material community, which is “immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication; it is magical”, SW, I, 67, whereas Nancy, in comparison, says of beings that they “affect one another – even minerals do – and the world, or the sense of the world, is nothing other than the general communication of this emotion: the shaking of creation”, 2013, 85. In this respect, Nancy actually parts with Heidegger, for whom “[t]he stone is without a world” (cf. Nancy, 1997, 59). Nancy thus oppose Heidegger’s thought (namely, that ‘the worlding of the world’ only comes to be through *our* experiential access to it) by referring

filled or finally secured, but still makes us what we are, according to different aspects of our being. What makes religion stand out, in this respect, is that the very relation to that which transcends relations, a relation given and upheld by the name as name, is explicitly embodied in faith and practice, in myth and ritual. What springs from this manifestation is that not only is nothingness, or transcendence, revealed as the premise of mortal being, but so is also the other of this other, namely the presence of a being which, in religious language and through humanity, is concerned with its own end.

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to a preceding contact between all things existing (their 'being-among' and 'being-between'), which makes us humans beings in the same sense as stones, *op.cit.* 60.

## 8 Conclusion

I have been trying in this book to follow a course of thinking which relates a philosophical self-reflection, and accordingly a certain philosophical positioning, with the task of understanding religion. The professed point of view has been, from the beginning, that religion cannot be determined as something independent of how we relate to 'it'. Rather, a philosophical concept of religion emerges from the engagement itself (and philosophy's engagement with itself). Inasmuch as this engagement involves, among other things, an estrangement owing to the passing of time, many aspects of religion are inevitably drawn into a picture of something fundamentally 'other'. It stands to reason that one cannot but adopt an alienated stance when approaching myth and religion from a point of view that no longer springs from their own source. It does not mean, however, that there are no channels left. Part of the present investigation has thus been to locate points of convergence in the flow of cultural manifestations between religious and philosophical attitudes and proclivities. The terminologically self-imposing distinction between religion and non-religion may, in fact, be deceptive. I acknowledge that in order to speak about religion, one need to speak of it *as if* it exists *as such*. I have, therefore, spoken about *myth* and *religion* throughout as if they exist as self-identical entities. This doesn't change the fact that religion is thereby construed as something by and through which we recognize how, and in what sense, the philosophical engagement with it is no longer religious. It should not imply, of course, that religion is, thereby, represented arbitrarily, but it is indeed re-presented. Its presence, if such there is, is in this book's line of thought a derived and suppressed presence, which is exactly what a representation in general is. By this I don't want to imply that there is, after all, something essentially religious which is just out of reach as a *Ding an Sich*, but merely that an ongoing transformation inevitably takes place. What I claim is that the presence of what once was *is no longer* the same presence. Yet, culture changes gradually, and nothing of what a religion might have been, in its formative phase, have been substituted by something else overnight. To put it differently, religion becomes religion again and again, reinvented, reinterpreted, never the same, though probably never something completely different either. The concept of 'religion' is meaningful as there are only so many ways in which the term can be used.

Part of the changes by which religion turns into something else, as Cassirer, for instance, has noted, is the recognition of conceptuality. If religion is a birthplace, at least in theology and philosophical mysticism, of recognizing a split between the expressible and the inexpressible (reflecting the split between being and beings, transcendence and immanence), then concepts become, in principle, inadequate, and the texture of religion's relation to myth is loosened by its very threads. In contexts where concepts even become abstractions, religion and philosophy are joined in metaphysics (and have thus been bedfellows for centuries). At the dawn of modernity, it seemed that philosophy was the one to grow out of this longstanding fellowship as the adult guardian: as if human reasoning reached maturity, taking over from God!



Yet a shadow of myth followed closely in the footsteps of this development, divulging a 'truth' which has been with us for a while, namely that the changes, gaining momentum in Romanticism and onwards, were anything but one-directed, and that they, therefore, resulted in a fragmentation of reason rather than in a self-preserving autonomy. It took a pragmatic turn, however, undertaken by the later Wittgenstein, to point out the mythical character of our accustomed use of language and the magical traits clinging to metaphysical reifications; it took a revision of Kant, carried out by Benjamin and Cassirer, for instance, to realize the profundity of symbolic imagination, and it took a fundamental ontology, by Heidegger, to renew the question of being as addressing the basic conditionality of mortal existence.

Taking my own view in the aftermath of these lines of thought, I have laid out a perspective in which religion is summoned as a stranger in the twilight of being friend as well as foe, a partner as well as an adversary, within a self-reflecting stance of philosophy. My thesis is that 'truth', 'name', and 'habitation' emerge as nodes of existential importance in religion seen from the angle of thinking initiated in the Twentieth Century and that this perspective not only structures a certain view of religion but is also a theme in its own right in contemporary philosophy as exemplified in the thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy. However, the respects in which these confluences appear differ. What may be glimpsed from the pragmatic view of truth, for instance, as so many uses of the word (challenging the notion of a single concept of truth), does not find a parallel in myth or religion. Instead, myth and religion seem to be recognizable *instances* of this pragmatic 'truth' contrary to their own view. Thus, the appearance of a translatable concept of truth in the context of myth and religion (namely as *subject* rather than *predicate*, unquestionable rather than questionable) is fostered by its own 'other', that is, determined by an alienating, pragmatic view of truth that it does not share. In this case, the philosophical thought of the present study does, not coincidentally, go against religion, since what makes religion speak of truth as that which *gives* the sense of things has an undeniable connection with what has made philosophy commit itself to metaphysics. With respect to the topic of 'the name', indicating a non-conceptual dimension of language, the case seems to be the opposite. If Benjamin, for instance, is right in discerning a pure language, expressed by the name, in the ineffable furrows of our conceptual and habitual thinking, my point would be that only myth and (to some degree) religion can express this without the philosophical conceptuality that is the 'other' of this naming. According to Benjamin the gist of undisturbed correspondences are most likely, today, to be picked up by art rather than by philosophy (whose critical obligation to truth inhibits it), and thus philosophy can never substitute that which is proclaimed in religion (that is, a Messianic redemption, in the optics of Benjamin). Contrary to this 'hope-inclined' negativism or defeatism (which appears to be shared by Nancy), an attempt to *positively* embrace that which speaks from the depth of language is found in Heidegger's attempt to listen to Being and let things and words be thought, rather than to think – conceptually – *about* them. In this attempt we sense a mystical gesture which, in Benjamin's and Cassirer's

view, might be partly reminiscent of Goethe's retreat into the thicket of myth. In this respect, Benjamin and Cassirer behold myth and religion through the lens of departure, whereas Heidegger, who loathes any kind of self-securing objectification, strives to dig deeper, being touched, as it seems, by a strain of nostalgia. Benjamin, on the other hand, who finds himself dialectically engaged with the ruins of the past, looks upon it in melancholia.

The lens through which Wittgenstein looks upon the past is neither that of nostalgia nor melancholia, but rather a philosophical disturbance of realizing the strangeness of a human form of life (which puts him somewhat in line with Borges, Cavell, Flood, and Nancy). There is neither any veneration for ancient religion, nor any faith in philosophical truth, in the later Wittgenstein, for whom the practice that makes us social beings can be gleaned from science as well as from religion and philosophy. All distinctions have a practical use, though we are confused, or confuse ourselves, us into believing that they are also independently true. Instead of regarding myth and religion as closed entities or things of the past, however, we might learn something about ourselves by seeing – and recognizing – both 'phenomena' as aspects of a human form of life. Thus, by discovering a mythical tendency in our use of language, we might be able to sense that what flows through myth and religion may also flow through concepts which, so to speak, *regard* themselves as other. Inasmuch as the estrangement of such recognition may reopen channels between philosophy and religion, we should take care not to embrace too willingly the philosophical pitfalls of mysticism. On the one hand, I think we will have to 'secure' or stand in philosophy as being a strictly conceptual engagement; on the other hand, I shall be the first to admit that this 'self-sheltering retreat' is but one way of securing a residence, a habitation in the world. But philosophers are no gods. Thus, one of the pertinent elements that science and philosophy share with religion is the attempt to find a home in mortal existence, to locate or constitute a pertinence in that which forgoes, to weave a thread over the abyss of nothingness. Whereas science deals with the strangeness of the world by demystifying it in the attempt to secure a safe haven for human lives (suspending the implications of future costs), religion embraces the strange by naming it, by familiarizing itself with the source of our angst, the nothingness in the heart of being. By drawing a seasonal circle around it, it honors the future in ways that science will, at some point, be forced to realize in its own way, but that is only an implicit thematic of this book. What I have focused on is a certain transition in the style of habitation from religion to philosophy (though viewed in retrospect), namely, that the home we have absconded, the totality of the world, including the duality of worldly and otherworldly being, has left a trace of something uncanny, unhomely (*Unheimlich*), an angst related to what now appears uninhabitable. The veil which modernity believes to have been lifted from the face of religious belief reveals nothing, or nothing *but* Nothing. In this disclosure, which is another word for the relationship between philosophy and religion, we might get a glimpse of the non-conceptual 'truth' or 'presence' of religion. In the eyes of a post-metaphysical philosophy, religion names itself,

its own reality, by the name of Nothing, which is but a conceptual reflection of the emptiness gleaned from a philosophical mirror, a *modern* emptiness through which human thought stands the risk of losing foothold in the world, eating from its own non-existing flesh, as it were. A current philosopher such as Jean Luc-Nancy dares to face this predicament, this current state of being, and yet continue to grabble with what is left, estranged, and yet reopening, in a historical world of tradition which speaks through our immediate, and universal, conditionality. Perhaps religion can still keep philosophy thinking, so that philosophy can keep up its critical engagement with religion.

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